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THE REPROACH
OF
ANNESLEY.

MAXWELL GRAY,

Author of "THE SILENCE OF DEAN MAITLAND," &c.

"Give me the man that is not passion's slave."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON
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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

FOOTSTEPS.

Silence and solitude reigned all around; a solitude invaded by the appearance of no living creatures save distant flocks of sheep dotted at large over upland pastures or grouped in wattled folds; a silence rather deepened than broken by the peculiar and by no means unmusical sound of the wind sweeping through the short pale-yellow bents which rose sparsely above the fine rich down-turf. The narrow, white high-road ran straight along the summit of the down; it was unfenced on one side where the turf sloped so abruptly towards a rich cultivated level as to make this almost invisible from the road, and on the other bounded by a bank, purple in summer with wild thyme,

and crested by a high quickset hedge, which effectually concealed the northern slope of the down and the wooded country beneath it spreading away to the sea. This thorn hedge, which in default of leaves and blossoms, bore masses of thick and hoary lichen, instead of growing erect from its bank, running nearly east and west, was arched over to the north-east in an accurate curve, due to the fierce, briny sweep of the prevailing winds, and was by the same agency smoothly shorn on the windward side. These strong salt winds, blowing off the sea and frequently rising to gales, give all the trees and hedges within their influence a marked family likeness, stunting their growth, and forcing them to bow to the north-east as if suddenly made rigid in the height of a south-west gale.

But the salt south-west was silent on this cloudy March afternoon, and in its place a bleak east wind, whirling the white dust from the flinty chalk road, and quieting gradually down as the sun drew nearer the west, was sweeping over the short turf with its low,

lonely sound, which is half whistle and half moan. The rich level to the south of the down, sprinkled though it was with occasional farms, each having its cluster of ricks and elm trees, and varied here and there by a village spire rising from a little circle of thatched roofs, looked solitary beneath the grey sky. It terminated on the east in some picturesquely broken hills, interrupted by a long level grey band, which was the sea, and on the south in more hills of moderate height and irregular outline, which derived an unusual grandeur this afternoon from the deep purple shadows resting upon them, and emphasizing their contour against the silvery grey sky, a sky full of latent light. On the west again there were hills of gentler outline, beyond these little glimpses of plain and woodland, and on the furthest limit a curving break filled with a polished surface of sea, reflecting the dim yellow lustre of the declining sun, which glowed faintly through the curdling clouds above.

The wind went on singing its strange low

song to the bleak down-land; the far-off farms and villages gave no sign of life; but one solitary sea-gull sailed slowly by on its wide, unearthly looking wings far below the level of the high-road, yet far above the plain beneath, uttering its complaining cry, and receiving the pale reflected sun-rays upon its cream-white plumage, thus making a centre of light upon the purply-grey darkness of the plain and the hills. It passed gradually out of sight, and the silence seemed more death-like than before.

Yet life and music were near, and only awaiting the summons of soft airs and warm sunbeams to spring forth and make the earth glad with beauty and melody. The gnarled, storm-bent thorns were showing tiny leaf-buds on their brown branches where the tangled grey lichens did not usurp their place; cowslips were pushing little satiny spirals through the short turf on the hedge-banks; down in the copses, and beneath sheltered hedge-rows, primroses were showing their sweet, pensive faces, and white violets were budding. Many

a nest was already built; many a bird already felt the welcome pressure of eggs beneath its warm breast and tasted the fulness of the spring-time; the tall elms on the plain already wore their warm purple robe of blossom; black buds on grey ash-stems in the copses were swelling to bursting-point above the primroses. Yet all seemed lifeless; the red-brown leaves on the oak boughs shivered in the blast; it was scarcely possible to prophesy of the green and golden glory that would clothe them in one brief month. Could those dry bones live?

Presently something black rose silently and swiftly above the green turf border of the chalk road. Beneath it appeared a human face, next a pair of broad shoulders, and finally the whole figure of a man emerged, as if from the heart of the earth, and stood fully outlined against the chill sky.

He was young, and strongly rather than gracefully built; the keen wind, from which he did not flinch by so much as an eye-blink, imparted a healthy pink to his clear com-

plexion. His fair hair was crisped by the wind, and his grey eyes looked all round the wide scene, on which his back had been turned while stepping lightly up the down, in a singular manner. Instead of gazing straight forward like other peoples' they looked downwards from beneath his eyelids, as if he had difficulty in raising the latter. Having rapidly surveyed earth, sea and sky, he turned and walked westwards along the edge of turf by the road, so that his footsteps still made no sound, drew a watch from his pocket, then replaced it beneath his warm overcoat, muttering to himself, "Early yet."

Soon he heard a sound as of a multitudinous scraping and panting, above which tinkled a bell; a cloud of dust rose from the road, showing as it parted the yellow fleeces and black legs and muzzles of a flock of Southdown sheep. He stood aside motionless upon the turf, to let them pass without hindrance; but one of the timid creatures, nevertheless, took fright at him, and darted down

the slope, followed by an unreasoning crowd of imitators. It did not need a low, faint cry from the shepherd, who loomed far behind above the cloud of white dust, himself spectral-looking in his long, greyish-white smock-frock, to send the sheep-dog sweeping over the turf, with his fringes floating in the wind, and his tongue hanging from his formidable jaws, while he uttered short, angry barks of reproof, and drove the truants into the right path again. But again and yet again some indiscretion on the part of the timid little black-faces demanded the energies of their lively and fussy guardian, who darted from one end of the flock to the other with joyous rapidity, hustling this sheep, grumbling at that, barking here, remonstrating there, and driving the bewildered creatures hither and thither with a zeal that was occasionally in excess, and drew forth a brief monosyllable from his master, which caused the dog to fly back and walk sedately behind him with an instant obedience as delightful as his intelligent activity. The actual commander of this

host of living things gave little sign of energy, but walked heavily behind his charges with a slow and slouching gait, partially supporting himself on his long crooked stick, and carrying under his left arm a lamb which bleated in the purposeless way characteristic of these creatures. Yet the shepherd's gaze was everywhere, and he, like his zealous lieutenant, the dog, could distinguish each of these numerous and apparently featureless creatures from the other, and every now and then a slight motion of his crook, or some inarticulate sound, conveyed a whole code of instructions to the eager, watchful dog, who straightway acted upon them. All this the young man motionless on the turf watched with interest, as if a flock of sheep were something uncommon or worthy of contemplation; and when they had all gone by, and the shepherd himself passed in review, his yellow, sun-bleached beard shaken by the keen wind he was facing, he transferred his attention to him.

"Blusterous," said the shepherd, making

his crook approach his battered felt hat, when he came up with him.

"Very blusterous," answered the gentleman, nodding in a friendly manner and going on his way.

This was their whole conversation, and yet the shepherd pondered upon it for miles, and recounted it to his wife as one of the day's chief incidents.

"And I zes to 'n, 'Blusterous'—I zes; and he zes to me, 'Terble blusterous,' he zes. Ay, that's what 'ee zed, zure enough," he repeated, with infinitesimal variations, while smoking his after-supper pipe in his chimney-corner.

Thus, you see, human intercourse may be carried on in these parts of the earth with a moderate expenditure of words.

Gervase Rickman went his way pondering upon the shepherd and his flock. How foolishly helpless and helplessly foolish the bleating innocent-faced sheep looked, as they blundered aimlessly out of the road, one blindly following the next in front with such lack of purpose, that the wonder was that

here and there a solitary sheep should have sufficient intellect to strike on a fresh path and mislead his fellows. And how abject they were to the superior intellect and volition of the dog. How tumultuously they fled before him, thus involving themselves in fresh disorder; how tamely they yielded to his behests, when so small an exercise of will on the part of each might have baffled him, in spite of his terrible fangs; above all, how like, how very like the mass of mankind, "the common herd," as they were so aptly called, they seemed to his musing fancy!

With what a sheep-like fidelity do men follow the few who from time to time blunder upon original paths, how blindly do they pursue them to unknown goals, and how abjectly do multitudes permit themselves to be swayed by the will of one with sufficient daring, energy, and intellect to dominate them! The mass needs a man, a strong personality, a powerful volition to lead it; it bows to the strongest, to a Moses, a Cæsar, a Gregory, a Charlemain, a Cromwell or a Napoleon; de-

mocracy is but the shadow of a shade—the aimless revolt of the aimless many against shackles that have been silently forged in the process of the ages—a revolt ending in the incoherence of anarchy, weltering helplessly on until one is born strong enough to lead and create anew; then the centuries solder and cement his work, and give it a fleeting permanence, and thus a civilization is born. Or the centuries refuse their sanction, and the work slowly resolves itself again to chaos. So Gervase Rickman mused.

But he was not of the herd; he would follow none. He felt within himself an intensity of purpose, and a passion of concentration, together with a strength of intellect that must lift him above his fellows. So he thought and mused, not knowing what was within him and into what channels the current of his character would set.

He went on his way, still keeping to the turf, and thus still silently, for it was his habit to move with as little sound as possible, until a barrow rose steeply before him and

compelled him to take the road. He was now approaching the end of the down road, at the extremity of which, where the thorn edge ended, there stood a little lonely inn in an empty courtyard, fenced by a low stone wall. On one side of the small house was a tree, bending as usual to the north-east, and imparting that air of perfect loneliness which the presence of a single tree invariably gives to an isolated building. The inn proclaimed itself the "Traveller's Rest" by a sign over its low porch and closed door. There were no flowers in the little court, though it faced the south; neither tree nor vegetable grew in the barren enclosure, which was tenanted solely by a large deer-hound stretched in a watchful attitude before the porch.

Mr. Rickman did not look at the inn, though a side glance of his eyes took in the dog with a sparkle of satisfaction; while the dog on hearing his footsteps, which were also faintly audible to two women in an upper room, slightly pricked his ears and looked at

him with an indifferent air, dropping his muzzle comfortably on to his fore-paws again when he had passed.

Another road crossed the level chalk road at right angles just beyond the solitary inn. Opposite the inn-front on the turf was a stagnant pond, the milky water of which was crisped to ripples by the keen wind, and in the angle formed by two roads stood a wooden sign-post.

When he reached the sign-post, Gervase Rickman leant against it with his back towards the inn, which was now some distance from him, and gazed over the broad expanse of level champain to the dark hills, on the broken slopes of which the shadows were shifting. He did not appear to mind the wind, which caught him full in the side of the face, ruffled his hair, and obliged him to press his low felt hat more firmly over his brows; the sound it made among the withered stalks above the sward pleased him, and he mused and mused in the stillness, an image of peaceful contem-

plation, with his refined features and look of quiet, concentrated power.

While he was thus musing, his quick ears caught the sound of footsteps in the distance behind him; but he did not turn his head, for the footsteps were those of a stranger and could not interest him, so he thought. They were the firm, elastic steps of a man in the flower of life, they smote the hard road with an even joyous rhythm, and were accompanied by the clear cheery tones of a voice singing,

> "As we lay, all the day,
> In the Bay of Biscay, O!"

Both song and footsteps penetrated to the quiet upper chamber in the inn, where two women sat together, one wasted with mortal sickness and wearing the unnatural rose of fever in her face, the other radiant with youth and health. The latter paused in her reading and looked up as the strain of manly song broke upon the quiet of the sick room; the invalid's face brightened, and she said it was a pleasant song.

"It is a good voice," said the reader, "and the voice of a gentleman."

The singer went joyously on his way, and paused in his song when he saw the motionless figure at the foot of the sign-post. Gervase Rickman still gazed dreamily away over the valley to the dark hills. A man has but to purpose a thing strongly to gain his purpose, he was thinking; fate is but the shadow of an old savage dream; a man's life is in his own hands. In fancy he saw the flock of sheep driven on and on along the dusty highway by the shepherd, whose figure suggested all sorts of images to his mind, save the august image of the Shepherd of mankind.

"To Medington four-and-a-half miles," was written on one of the arms of the sign-post above his head, and the pedestrian reading this, paused a moment and looked at the silent figure beneath, which with averted gaze appeared unconscious of his approach.

"Is this the only road to Medington?" he asked.

"No; there are four," replied Rickman,

facing about, but not meeting the level gaze of the stranger, as he replied to his salutation.

"Which takes me past Arden Manor?" asked the stranger, who looked as if he would enjoy a friendly chat.

"Neither."

"Surely that is Arden Manor I saw lying beneath the down by the church as I came along?"

"Yes."

"An old gentleman named Rickman lives there, I think; a queer old dry-as-dust of a fellow, who collects antiquities."

"A Mr. Rickman, F.R.S., lives there," replied Gervase, with a dry smile; "he also collects beetles. You are perhaps a brother naturalist or antiquary?"

"I know a beetle from a butterfly and that's about all," he said. "No; I was to go over the downs from Oakwell and meet a friend by Arden Manor on the road to Medington. I have evidently gone wrong."

"No: you are quite right. If you keep straight on you will come to Arden Cross at the foot of the hill. For Arden Manor you turn to the left, but that takes you away from Medington. Turn up the lane to the right, and you go direct over the downs to Medington, or straight on by the high-road you get to Medington."

"Paul meant Arden Cross," reflected the stranger aloud. "Thank you, I remember the down path now, that is the short cut. Can you help me to a light? This wind is too much for matches."

Gervase opened his jacket, and in the shelter thus made the stranger, stooping, for he was tall, struck a match and lighted a short pipe, thus giving the other the opportunity of a close and unobserved scrutiny of his face in the glow of the match. It was a dark, healthy, well-favoured face, on the whole the kind of face that goes to the heart of every woman, old or young.

"A good-looking fool," thought Gervase, consigning him mentally to the majority of

mankind. "Edward Annesley, no doubt; an officer, by his moustache and swagger."

He was wrong about the swagger: though the stranger walked like a soldier. Having lighted his pipe, the officer, thanking him for his courtesy, went on his way down the hill, and was lost to sight before the sound of his footsteps ceased to ring upon the hard road, Rickman looking after him with a superior sort of smile, until the sound of other steps, approaching from behind, stirred every fibre within him, and lit a flame in his veiled grey eyes.

On came the steps, swift, light, and even, very different from the soldier's firm strides, though telling like them of youth, health, and a light heart; yet Gervase, for all the stir of feeling they evoked within him, appeared to take no notice of them, but continued his rapt contemplation of the shadowed hill-slopes, brightened now by long moted shafts of light from the sinking sun, around which the clouds were breaking away in beautiful glory as the keen wind stilled itself

more and more in shifting to a warmer quarter.

A voice soon accompanied the light footsteps, echoing in a woman's round, clear notes, the soldier's song:

> "There we lay, all the day,
> In the Bay of Biscay, O!"

At this point Mr. Rickman left the post against which he had so long been leaning, and strolled quietly on without turning his head, while the singer, who made rapid progress, repeated her snatch of song, and the hound, which had been lying before the inn-door, flew before and around her in widening sweeps, all the grace and strength of its lithe slender body showing to the utmost advantage, until it included Gervase in its gyrations, whereupon he turned and waited, while a tall young woman came up with him.

"I thought you would never see me, Gervase," she said. "What deadly schemes were you meditating under the sign-post?"

"I was watching the weather," he replied; "the wind is chopping round, we shall have a change. Where have you been?"

"With Ellen Gale; I am glad for her sake the wind is changing, the east wind is so bad for her."

She came between Gervase and the setting sun, which grew more radiant each moment, and now sent forth a dazzling mesh of golden rays to tangle themselves in the fine growth of curling hairs roughed by the wind from her rich plaits beneath, thus forming a saint-like halo around the face of Alice Lingard, a face distinguished by that indefinable charm, which is the very essence of beauty, and yet is often wanting in the most perfect features. It was a charm which went to the very heart of the young man walking by her side, and yet which he could not describe; he knew only that it was lacking to every other face he had ever seen; he knew also that it was not given to everyone to discover that hidden grace. For each face has its own charm, the magic of which has different power over

different people, and enchants many or few, according to its own intrinsic potency.

The two walked on together at Alice's brisker pace, talking with the unconstraint of familiar friends; Alice involved in the glory of the warm sun-rays, while a deeper rose bloomed in her face as the fresh air touched it, and her blood warmed with the exercise; Gervase for the most part listening, and monosyllabic.

They passed a large deserted chalk quarry, its steep cliff-sides looking ghost-like, save where a stray sunbeam shot its long gold lustre upon them, and then they came round the shoulder of the down and saw, nestling beneath it, a church with a low, square, grey tower and a gabled stone house sheltered from the south-west by a row of weather-beaten Scotch firs; lower down along the valley ran a straggling village, all thatch and greenery. Then they left the chalk, and dipped into a deep sandy lane with steep banks and overhanging hedges, and here in sheltered nooks primroses were looking shyly

forth, and violets were pushing tiny buds to the light.

"But not a violet is out yet," said Alice.

This was the moment of Gervase's triumph. He took from a deep pocket a something carefully folded in a leaf, and, uncovering it, presented to his companion, with a quiet smile, a little posy of white violets, pink-tipped, and set in a gleaming circle of leaves.

She took it with an exclamation of pleasure, and lifted it to her fresh face to inhale its delicate fragrance. "To think that you should find the first!" she said, half jealously.

He was in the seventh heaven, but said nothing. He had secretly watched the budding of those violets for a week, and walked far and quickly to gather them for her that afternoon, and now he had his reward in seeing her caress the flowers and talk of them for a good five minutes, till the sound of hoofs along the lane behind them made her look up.

CHAPTER II.

FIRE-LIGHT.

The rapid beat of hoofs and the roll of wheels drew nearer and nearer, and a dog-cart drawn by a serviceable cob flashed down the hill towards the pedestrians with many a scattered pebble and spark of fire, for the dusk was now falling.

On reaching them, the driver pulled up the cob, and gave the reins to the groom, sprang to the ground, all in a flash of time, and was shaking hands with Gervase and Alice, and walking by their side almost before they had time to recognize him. Alice gave him a frank smile of welcome, and Gervase smiled too, but he murmured something inaudibly to himself that was not flattering to the newcomer.

The latter was a young man, with a dark, strong, intelligent face, which had just missed being handsome. He walked well, dressed well, and had about him a certain air which would have challenged attention anywhere. He did not look like a parish doctor.

"And how are they all at Arden?" he asked, in a full, cordial voice. "Where *did* you get those violets? It is enough to make a man mad. I thought these were the first."

And he drew a second little bunch of white violets from his breast pocket and gave them to Alice, who received them with another frank smile.

"How kind of you to think of me!" she said. "Gervase found these, but he was only five minutes ahead of you."

Gervase smiled inwardly; the new-comer's face darkened, and he silently returned the rude observation the former had made upon him a moment before; and then comforted himself by the reflection, "Gervase is nobody."

"So you have been visiting my patients again, Miss Lingard," he said aloud; "you must not go about making people well in this reckless way. How are we poor doctors to live?"

"Did you find Ellen any better?" she asked.

"She was wonderfully perked up, as the cottagers say; I knew you had been there, without any telling. We must try to get her through the spring winds. I say, Rickman, you haven't seen such a thing as a stray cousin anywhere about, have you?"

"I did catch sight of such a creature half-an-hour since," he replied. "He asked me the way to Medington by Arden Manor, where one Paul, it appeared, had agreed to meet him."

"A tall, good-looking fellow with a pleasant face——"

"And a beautiful voice," interrupted Alice. "It must be the gentleman I heard singing past the 'Traveller's Rest,' Gervase. I was just going to ask if you had seen him."

"He sings like a nightingale. Yes; that was no doubt Ted. Oh! you will all like him. I shall bring him over to the Manor, if I can. I don't say if I may," he added with a smile.

"Because you know we are always pleased to see your friends," returned Gervase. "But your cousin is an old friend of ours, Annesley, and evidently remembered us. He asked if a queer old fellow named Rickman lived in Arden Manor down there."

"The rascal! Did you tell him he was speaking to the queer old fellow's son?"

"Not I. I wanted to hear what he would say about us."

"What a shame?" said Alice; "those are the bad underhand ways Sibyl and I are always trying to overcome in you. Well, Dr. Annesley, here is Arden Cross, but no cousin, apparently."

"He would be well over St. Michael's Down by this time," added Gervase. "But who is this, coming down the lane?"

Two figures emerged from the deeply-

shadowed lane which led from the down to the paler dusk of the cross roads, and discovered themselves to be an elderly labouring man and a youth, who touched their hats and then stopped.

"Evening, miss; evening, sir. Ben up hoam, Dacter? Poor Eln was terble bad 's marning," said the elder, who was no other than the host of the "Traveller's Rest," Jacob Gale.

"Ellen was better," replied the doctor cheerfully.

"Oh! yes; she was really quite bright when I saw her," added Alice, in a still more encouraging voice.

The man shook his head. "She won't never be better," he growled, "though she med perk up a bit along of seeing you, miss. I've a zin too many goo that way to be took in, bless your heart. How long do ye give her, Dacter? I baint in no hurry vur she to goo, as I knows on," he added, with a view to contradict erroneous impressions.

The doctor replied that it was impossible to say; she might linger for months, or she might go that night.

"They all goos the zame way," continued the man, "one after t'other, nothun caint stop em. There was no pearter mayde about than our Eln a year ago come Middlemass, a vine-growed mayde she was as ever I zeen," he repeated in a rough voice, through which the very breath of tragedy sighed; "zing she 'ood like a thrush, and her chakes like a hrose. A peart mayde was our Eln, I war'nt she was."

"She is very happy; she is willing to go," said Alice, trying to comfort him.

"Ah! they all goos off asy. My missus she went fust; a vine vigour of a ooman, too. Vive on 'em lies down Church-lytten there, Miss Lingard, and all in brick graves, buried comfortable. They've a got to goo and they goos. Hreuben here, he'll hae to go next. There's the hred in 's chakes, and he coughs terbly aready."

Reuben smiled pensively; he was a hand-

some lad, with dark eyes and a delicate yet brilliant pink-and-white complexion.

"Nonsense," interposed Paul, "Reuben's well enough. You shouldn't frighten the boy. Give him good food, and his cough will soon go. Don't you believe him, Reuben. You are only growing fast."

"He'll hae to goo long with t'others," continued the father, "dacters ain't no good agen a decline. A power of dacter's stuff ben inside of they that's gone. They've all got to goo, all got to goo."

"Reckon I'll hae to goo," added Reuben, in a more cheerful refrain to his father's melancholy chant.

Alice tried in vain to reason the pair into a more hopeful frame of mind, and then scolded them, and finally bid them good-night, and they parted, the heavy boots of the two Gales striking the road in slow funereal beats as they trudged wearily up-hill, the lighter steps of the gentlefolk making swift and merry music downwards.

"Oh, Paul!" said Alice, turning to him

after a backward glance at the father and son, "we must save Reuben; we cannot let him die!"

"My dear Alice, you must not take all the illnesses in the parish to heart," interposed Gervase; "the boy will be all right, as Annesley told him. Why try to deprive Gale of his chief earthly solace? The old fellow revels in his own miseries. It is a kind of distinction to that class of people to have a fatal disease in their family."

"Hereditary too," added Paul; "as respectable as a family ghost in higher circles."

"Or the curse of Gledesworth. I am glad the curse does not blight the tenants as well as the landlord," continued Gervase. For Arden Manor belonged to the Gledesworth estate.

"Or the Mowbray temper," laughed Paul. "Nay, dear Miss Lingard, do not look so reproachful. I am doing my best for Reuben. But he is consumptive, and I doubt if he will stand another winter,

though his lungs are still whole. We must try to accept facts. Why, we poor doctors would be fretted to fiddle-strings in a month if we did not harden our hearts to the inevitable."

"But is this inevitable?" asked Alice, with an earnest gaze into his dark-blue eyes that set his heart throbbing. "Need this bright young life be thrown away? I know how good your heart is, and how you often feel most when you speak most roughly. But if Reuben were Gervase, you know that he would not have to die."

"You mean that I should order Gervase to the South, doubtless."

"Very well. And if we set our wits to work we may expatriate Reuben. We must. Gervase, you are great at schemes. Scheme Reuben into a warm climate before next winter."

"We have received our orders, Annesley," replied Gervase, laughing, as they turned up a broad lane, at the end of which the grey manor house, with its gables and mullioned

windows, loomed massive in the dusk—a dusk deepened on one side by the row of wind-bowed firs.

Paul accompanied them, as a matter of course, though he had turned quite out of his homeward way; while his servant, without asking or receiving orders, drove the dog-cart round to the stable-yard, whither the cob would have found his way alone, so accustomed was he to its welcome hospitality.

Through the gateway, with its stone piers topped by stone globes, and up the drive bounded by velvet turf of at least a century's growth, the three walked in the deepening dusk, and saw a ruddy glow in the uncurtained windows of the hall, round the porch of which myrtle grew mingled with ivy and roses. Gervase opened the door, and they entered a spacious hall wainscotted in oak, carved about the doorways and the broad chimney-piece, beneath which, on the open hearth, burnt a fire of wood. The leaping flames danced merrily on the polished walls; on a broad staircase shining

and slippery with beeswax and the labour of generations; on a few old pictures, some trophies of armour, and some oaken settles and chairs of an old quaint fashion; and upon a table near the hearth, on which a tea-service was set out.

An elderly lady sat by the fire, knitting and occasionally talking, for want of a better listener, to a cat sitting bolt upright in front of the fire, into which it stared, as if inquiring of some potent oracle, and sometimes turning its head with a blissful wink, in response to its mistress's voice. This lady was small and slight, with a rosy unwrinkled face, grey hair and an expression so innocent and sweet as to be almost childlike, yet she resembled Gervase sufficiently to prove herself his mother. Mrs. Rickman's grammar was hazy and her spelling uncertain; she was not sure if metaphysics were a science or an instrument; she habitually curtsied to the new moon, and did nothing important on a Friday (which sometimes caused serious domestic inconvenience); but her manners

were such as immediately put all who addressed her at their ease, and her pleasant uncritical smile encouraged, even invited, people to tell her their troubles, and confess their misdoings.

"Come, children," she said cheerily, rising when the door opened to busy herself at the table, "here is tea just made. What, Paul? I did not see you in the dusk. We have not seen you for an age, three days at least. Gervase, throw me on a fresh log, my dear."

"We certainly deserve no tea at this time of night," said Alice, who was busy laying aside her hat and furs. "Come, Hubert, leave the doctor alone and lie down by Puss."

The deer-hound, who had been fawning on Paul, stretched himself on the rug on one side of the fire, not daring to take the middle, since Puss disdained to move so much as a paw to make way for the new-comer.

Alice took the chair Gervase placed for her, and began showing Mrs. Rickman her two

bunches of violets, one of which she put in water, and the other (Paul observed with a thrill that it was his) in her dress.

"And where are Mr. Rickman and Sibyl?" he asked, flushing with a secret joy, while Gervase was deeply pondering the disposition of the violets, and persuading himself that his bunch was the more cherished, since it was secured from fading, and yet not quite sure on the point.

"Sibyl is at the parsonage practising with the choir," said Mrs. Rickman. "Mr. Rickman is on the downs examining some barrows which have just been opened, and no one knows when he will be back. Alice, my dear child, what a fearful state your hair is in!"

Alice put up her hands with a futile attempt to smooth her curly wind-blown hair. "It doesn't matter in the firelight," she replied.

"Miss Lingard is quite right about the firelight," said Paul, in his stately manner. "An elegant negligence suits best with this idle moment in the dusk. Yes, if you forgive my saying so, Alice, you make a delight-

ful picture on that quaint settle, with the hound at your knee, and the armour above your head, and the hearth blazing beneath that splendid old chimney near."

He did not add what he thought, that the grace with which she sat half-reclined in the cross-legged oaken seat, and the sweet expression of her face lighted by the flickering flames, made the chief charm of the picture.

"Dr. Annesley," replied Alice, meeting his gaze of earnest and respectful admiration, "you are becoming a courtier. I do not recognize my honest old friend, Paul, with his blunt but wholesome rebuffs."

"It is I who am rebuffed now," he replied, singularly discomposed by the gravity of her manner.

"Nonsense, Paul," interrupted Mrs. Rickman. "Alice can only be pleased by such a pretty compliment. You ought to be of Gervase's profession."

"Yes; I always maintained that Annesley would make a first-rate lawyer," added Gervase.

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Annesley, with a fervour that was almost religious.

Gervase laughed, and rose to settle a half-burnt log which threatened to fall when burnt asunder, thus ruining a fire landscape on which Alice had been dreamily gazing.

"How cruel you are—you have shattered the most romantic vision of crags and castles!" she said. "And you have destroyed the poetry of the hour, for I must light these candles."

"Were you seeing your future in the fire?" Paul asked, lighting the candles she brought forward, thrilling with delicate emotion when he touched her hand accidentally, and caught the play of the candle-light on her features.

Gervase watched them narrowly, though furtively, with a secret pity for Paul, for a vision less keen than his might detect a total absence of response on her part to the young doctor's unspoken feeling; and then he thought of his own future, which he read in the dull red glow of the fire, while the others

kept up a desultory conversation in which their thoughts did not enter.

He had drifted, he scarcely knew how, into the office of Whewell and Son, solicitors. His mind in those early days had taken no bent sufficiently strong to make him resist his father's desire that he should follow law, since he declined the paternal profession of physic, a profession which Mr. Rickman, a London physician with a fair practice, had early left because he said he could not endure the whims of sick people, but really because, having a competency, he wished to pursue his favourite studies in the quiet of Arden, where Sybil was born when Gervase was about nine years old.

But once in the office, he found much to interest him, and after making progress from a desire to do his duty and please his parents, whose hopes all rested on their only son, ambition awoke in him, and he decided to make himself the head of the firm, and the firm the head of the profession in the county. This, at eight-and-twenty, he had accom-

plished. Whewell and Son was now Whewell and Rickman. The younger Whewell had renounced a profession that wearied him, and the elder was at an age when love of ease is stronger than love of power, and it was well known that the junior partner was the soul of the business, which daily increased.

As far as a country solicitor could rise, Gervase Rickman intended to rise, and then he intended to enter Parliament, where he felt his powers would have an opportunity of developing. This purpose he had as yet confided to no one, though he was daily feeling his way and laying the foundations of local popularity. A man who makes himself once heard in the House of Commons has, he knew, providing he possesses the genius of a ruler of men, a destiny more brilliant than that of any sovereign in the civilized world, and Gervase, looking at the burning brands and listening to the harmonious blending of Paul's deep voice with Alice's pure treble, saw such magni-

ficent prospects as the others did not dream him capable of entertaining. And through all those princely visions Alice moved with an imperial grace.

"But what has become of your cousin all this time?" Alice was asking the doctor.

"Over the downs and in Medington by this time. We don't dine till half-past seven, so my mother will have a good hour to purr over the fellow and make much of him. Ned always was a lucky fellow, if you remember, Mrs. Rickman. He had the knack of making friends."

"He was a winning and well-behaved boy, I remember," she replied. "How fond Sibyl was of him!"

"It is just the same now, or rather it was at school. Whatever Ned did, people liked him. If he neglected his lessons, he always got off in class by means of lucky shots. Other fellows' shots failed. Born under a happy star."

"Yet he must inherit the curse of Gledesworth," Alice said.

"Oh! that is at an end. Reginald Annesley, being in a lunatic asylum, fulfils the conditions of the distich,

> "Whanne ye lorde ys mewed in stonen celle,
> Gledesworth thanne shalle brake hys spelle."

"Facts seem against the theory," Gervase said, "since the estate cannot now pass from Reginald Annesley to his son. By the way, have you not heard, Paul? Young Reginald is dead, killed while elephant-hunting in South Africa."

"Captain Annesley? Reginald? Dead?" cried Paul, with excitement. "We heard he was in Africa, and his wife and baby came home. Are you sure? Is it not some repetition of poor Julian's story?"

"It is perfectly true," replied Gervase, who was agent to the Gledesworth estate; "the news arrived yesterday."

Paul Annesley's father was first cousin to the Annesley who owned the estate, and who was only slightly acquainted with him. Paul did not even know any of those Annesleys, and the mad Annesley having had three sons, one

of whom was married, and all of whom had grown to manhood, the prospect of inheriting the family estates had never entered his wildest dreams. But now only two lives stood between him and that rich inheritance; the life of an elderly maniac and that of an infant. No one knew better than he how large a percentage of male infants die.

"It is terribly sad," he said. "Oh! it does seem as if the curse was a reality, and worked still."

"I never believed in the curse," said Mrs. Rickman; "and I disbelieve it still. People die when the Almighty sees fit, it is not for us to ask why."

But Alice was a firm believer in the curse of Gledesworth, and defended its morality stoutly. Why, if blessings are attached to birth, should not pains and penalties cling to it as well? she asked. Was it worse to be a doomed Annesley than the offspring of a criminal or the inheritor of fatal disease, like the family at the "Traveller's Rest?"

"I think I would rather be an Annesley,"

she added, turning to Paul with a smile that seemed to reach the darkest recesses of his heart, and kindle a glow of vital warmth within him.

Then they fell to discussing the Gledesworth legend. In the days of King John a lord of Gledesworth died, leaving one young son, and the dead lord's brother, not content with seizing the lands, drove the widow and orphan from his door. One day in the hard winter weather, the widow appeared in want at the usurper's gates and begged bread for the starving child. And because she was importunate, the wicked baron set his hounds upon them and they killed the heir. Then the widow cursed the cruel baron, fled into the forest and was seen no more. But from that hour Gledesworth lands never descended to the eldest son; so surely as a man owned Gledesworth, sorrow of some kind befell him; the land was a curse to its owner, as was the Nibelungen Hoard to whomsoever possessed it.

The morally weak point in the curse, as

Gervase often observed, when beguiled to discuss the tragic stories of that fatal line, was that there appeared to be no chance of expiating the wicked baron's misdeeds, while the number of innocent victims who suffered from the curse was appalling.

"You are a hardened sceptic," Paul said. "Besides, you forget the 'stonen celle.'"

"Worse still. Because no owner of Gledesworth likes to exchange it for a stone cell, are all his descendants to be doomed?"

"You cannot measure a retribution which for good and for ill extends into the infinite, by the events of a rudimentary and finite world," Alice said.

"Quite so," replied Paul; "I confess to a great affection for the family curse. It keeps the idea of God before men's minds, though only a God of retribution," an observation which cheered Mrs. Rickman's kind heart, troubled as it was by sad rumours of Annesley's scepticism, and led on to a discussion in which they all lost themselves in the old interminable puzzles of the origin of

Evil, the limits of Fate and the bounds of Will, till the hall clock gave musical warning of the hour, and Paul took hasty leave, finding himself belated.

When he was gone, Alice drew a chair to her adopted mother's side and began to tell her what she had done all the afternoon, and was duly scolded for various lapses of memory. She had lived in that house from her thirteenth year, being an orphan placed there by her guardians, that she and Sybil might benefit from each other's society, and they had studied and grown up together so happily, that Alice hoped, on becoming the mistress of her own little fortune a year hence, to remain with them.

"Stay a minute, Alice," Gervase said, when a few minutes later she was about to follow Mrs. Rickman upstairs. "If you are not tired, I should like you to let me rehearse my speech for the Liberal meeting next week."

Alice willingly acquiesced, but asked if it

would not be better to wait for Sybil's return.

He laughed, and said that Sibyl had already been treated to two rehearsals; so Alice took up her station in the corner of the hall furthest from the staircase, which Gervase ascended till he reached the landing, behind the balustrade of which he stood beneath a lamp and looked down into the wide, echoing hall, the dark panelling of which was but faintly lighted by a swinging lamp in its centre, and by the fitful fire-glow. Alice was scarcely seen; but not a gesture or look of Gervase could escape her, and she was surprised when, taking a roll of notes from his pocket, his form dilated, his eyes kindled as they took a commanding glance of the wide space before him, and he sent his voice, which in conversation was harsh, echoing through the hall with a power which she had never suspected, and invested the political common-places which he uttered with a certain dignity. The cat sprang up in alarm; Hubert rose and sat listening at his mistress's

feet with a critical air; Alice cried "Hear, hear!" and "No, no!" at intervals, for a good half-hour. Then the door opened, and Sybil returned from her choir practice and made an addition to the audience.

"And did you ever hear such rubbish in your life, Sybil?" Alice asked, laughing.

"No," she replied, "I was never at a political meeting before."

CHAPTER III.

SHADOWS.

Edward Annesley, finding no trace of his cousin at Arden Cross, took the path indicated to him over the next link in the chain of downs, dismissing Gervase Rickman from his mind with a dim momentary remembrance of having seen and disliked him before.

Thus every day we pass men and women whose hearts leap and ache like our own, taking no more count of them than of the stones along our path, though any one of these may turn the current of our destiny and alter our very nature.

The setting sun was now breaking through the splendour of the shifting clouds and lighting up, like a suddenly roused memory, the once-familiar but half-forgotten landscape,

with its limits of hill and sea, its lake-like sheet of slate roofs down in the hollow where the confluence of two slow streams formed the River Mede. The lake of blue roofs, brooded over by a dim cloud of misty smoke, out of which rose the tall white church tower, its western face touched by the sun's fleeting glow, was Medington, the town in which he had passed many a school-boy's holiday.

All was now familiar: the furze in which he and Paul once killed snakes and looked for rabbit-holes; the copses where they gathered nuts and blackberries; and the hamlet with the stone bridge over its mirror-like stream, widening into a pond at the foot of the hill, which fell there in an abrupt steep, down which the cousins had made many a rapid descent, tobogganing in primitive fashion. There stood the mill with its undershot wheel; the plaintive cry of the moor-hen issued from the dry sedge rustling in the March wind; all sorts of long-forgotten objects appeared and claimed old acquaintance with him. The chimes of the church

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clock came floating through the dim grey air like a friendly voice from far-off boyhood, and after a little musical melancholy prelude, struck six deep notes.

He took the old field-path, thinking of things and people forgotten for years, and reflected that the two boys who played in those fields and who afterwards passed a year or two at a French school together, were now men, partly estranged by the exigencies of life, until he found himself in the clean, wind-swept streets of the town, where the lamps were every moment showing tiny points of yellow fire in the dusk, and the shop-windows were casting pale and scant radiance upon the almost deserted pavement; for even in the High Street there were few passengers at this hour, and little was heard save the cries of children at play, and the occasional rumble of a cart and still more occasional roll of a carriage. No one knows what becomes of the inhabitants of small country towns when they are not going to church or to market; the houses stand along

the streets, but rarely give any sign of life; the shops offer their merchandise apparently in vain.

He stopped before a large red-brick house, draped with graceful hangings of Virginia creeper, now a mass of bare brown branches rattling drily in the wind; a house which withdrew itself, as if in aristocratic exclusiveness, some yards back from the line of houses rising flush with the street, and was fenced from intruders by a high iron railing, behind which a few evergreens grew, half-stifled by the thick coating of dust upon their shining leaves. There were three doors, one on each side, and one approached by a flight of steps in the middle; on one of the side doors the word "Surgery" was painted, and upon the railings was a brass plate, with "Paul Annesley, Surgeon, &c.," engraved upon it.

He was admitted by the central door into a large hall occupying the whole depth of the house, and having a glass garden-door on its opposite side. He had scarcely set foot within it when a door on his right opened,

and from its comparative darkness there issued into the radiance of the lamp-lit hall a tall and stately woman, with snow-white hair, and large, bright blue eyes. Save her snowy hair, she showed no sign of age; her step was elastic, her figure erect as a dart.

"How do you do, Aunt Eleanor?" said Edward, going up to her and kissing the still blooming cheeks offered for his salute. "I missed Paul, as you see. How well you are looking!"

Mrs. Annesley held his hands and looked into his face with a seraphic smile, while she replied to his salutations, and said, with formal cordiality:

"Welcome, dear nephew, welcome to our dwelling. Paul should have been here to receive you, but his medical duties have doubtless detained him. You know what martyrs to duty medical men are. You may remember your dear uncle's life with its constant interruptions."

"Yes, I remember," returned Edward, not dreaming that his cousin's medical duties at

that moment consisted in drinking tea in the firelight and talking to a most attractive young woman. "I suppose you never know when to expect Paul."

"Never," she said, taking Edward's arm and walking with a slow step and rustling dress into the drawing-room, which was darkened by heavy curtains in the windows, and was only lighted by the fitful gleam of the fire. "Indeed, my life would be very sad and solitary but for the happiness it gives me to think that my dearest child is of so much use to his fellow-creatures. That, dear Edward, is my greatest consolation." Mrs. Annesley sank with the air of a saintly empress or imperial saint upon her throne-like arm-chair by the fire, and sighed softly and smiled sweetly as she arranged the white satin strings of her delicate cap, which bore but a traditional resemblance to the widow's cap she had long since discarded as unbecoming.

Having dutifully placed a footstool for her, he took his seat on the opposite side of the

fire, and began losing himself in admiration and wonder of his seraphic and dignified aunt just as he had done in his boyhood, indeed something of his boyhood's awe returned to him in the fascination of her presence.

She still sat as upright as in those days; neither arm-chair nor footstool were needed, save as adjuncts to her dignity. Every little detail of her dress showed the accuracy and finish that only women conscious of a power to charm bestow on such trifles: there was old rich lace in her cap and about her neck; a few costly jewels, old friends of Edward's, were in her dress, a ring was on her hand, the diamonds in which caught the firelight and broke into a thousand tiny fierce flames; when she smiled, her well-formed lips showed a row of perfect pearls. She was an imposing, as well as a handsome figure.

Her nephew gazed earnestly at her for some time, while she went on in her smooth and gentle tones, asking after his mother and sisters, and telling him various little items of family news; while the firelight played upon

the soft richness of her dress, drew sparkles from her eyes and her jewels, and threw her shadow, as if in impish mockery, distorted into the changing shapes of old witch-like women, upon the wall behind her.

"Well, Aunt," he said at last, "I need not ask if you are well. You don't look a day older than you used to. I have done nothing but admire you for the last ten minutes."

"So, sir," she returned, smiling, "you have already learnt the arts of your profession, and know how to flatter. Fie on you, to practise on your old aunt! And, pray, how many young ladies have you bereaved of their hearts in this manner?"

"None," he replied, laughing. "I am not a lady-killer. I am put down as a slow fellow."

"Nay, my dear kinsman; I cannot believe that the ladies of these days have such bad taste. You have grown into such a tall fellow, you remind me of my sainted husband."

"My mother thinks me like my Uncle

Walter," he replied, wondering by what process his lamented uncle had been canonized after death, since during his life his injured wife accounted him the greatest of sinners; "an ugly likeness, she tells me with cruel candour. Here comes a carriage. Is it Paul's?" he added, going to the window and looking into the dimly-lighted street. "What a capital cob!"

The Admiral, as the cob was called, brought his rapid trot to a sudden end. Paul sprang up the steps with a rapidity which in some men would have been undignified, but in him only gave assurance of boundless vitality, and came in bringing a breath of the fresh night air and a suggestion of healthy manhood and out-of-door life with him.

The cousins met with less of the savage indifference which Englishmen usually think fit to assume to welcome their best friends; they shook hands more than once, and smiled. Paul even said that he was delighted to see his dear Ted, that it felt like old times to see

his honest face, and that he hoped he would be able to extend the brief visit he purposed making; while Edward avowed that it did him good to see his dear old Paul, and that he was glad to find the old fellow looking so jolly. Then they shook hands again, and the firelight danced upon Paul's irregular features and dark fiery blue eyes, and brought into unusual prominence a white scar beneath his left eye.

Edward remembered how Paul got that scar, and felt cold chills running over him.

After one more mighty grasp of his cousin's hand, Paul turned to his mother, who presented each cheek to him as she had done to Edward, and solemnly blessed him, as if he had been absent for months, or was at least a Spartan son returning with his shield rather than upon it. Then Paul enquired with an air of deep solicitude about various evil symptoms with which she appeared to have been afflicted in the morning, and was informed that all had happily yielded to treatment, save one.

"I still have that dreadful feeling of constriction across my eyes," she said, in a tone of mournful resignation.

"Have you, indeed?" returned Paul, earnestly. "Perhaps a little wine and your dinner may remove it. If not, I will give you a draught. I will take Ned at once to his room, and then we can dine without delay."

Edward's surprise at finding his comely aunt the victim of so many dreadful pains was forgotten in the lively chat of the dinner-table, as well as in the great satisfaction that meal afforded him after his long walk.

"Your renown has already preceded you, Edward," Paul observed. "Arden is already full of your arrival."

"Arden? Why I saw no soul there!"

"No? Have you forgotten the sign-post?"

"What! was that squint-eyed fellow an acquaintance of yours?" he asked.

"What do you think of that, mother, as a description of Gervase Rickman?" said Paul.

"You don't mean to say that was Gervase

Rickman?" exclaimed Edward. "I thought I had some faint remembrance of him. Heaven only knows what I said about his father! If he recognized me, why on earth couldn't he say so?"

"He was not sure till he described you to me. By the way, mother, I forgot to say why I was late. I met Rickman, and had to turn in at Arden."

It is thus that Love demoralizes; nothing else would have made Paul Annesley invent lies, especially useless ones. His mother looked amused at his demure face, then she glanced at Edward and laughed.

"And how *was* dear Sibyl?" she asked with satirical gravity.

"Sibyl? oh! I believe she was very well. She was out. You remember little Sibbie, Ned?" Paul said, tranquilly.

"A little mischievous imp who was always teasing us? Oh! yes, I daresay I should scarcely recognize her now. Is she grown into a beauty?"

"Are not all ladies beautiful?" returned

Paul. "You shall go over and judge for yourself before long."

"I heard a sad piece of news at Arden," he continued; "Captain Annesley is dead."

"Who was he?" asked Edward, indifferently. "There is an Annesley in the 100th Hussars; I never met him."

Mrs. Annesley flushed deeply and said nothing for a few moments. Paul looked at her, and the unspoken thought flashed from one to the other, "this brings us very near the Gledesworth inheritance."

"How very sad!" she said at last, in rather a hard voice, while Paul bit his lips and then drank some wine, half ashamed at the interpretation of the swift glance.

"It is important that you should know who Captain Annesley was, Edward," he said after a minute, "because after me, you are the next heir to the infant son he leaves."

"This is ghastly; the idea of my being your heir!" replied Edward, who was speedily enlightened as to the exact relationship, and properly refreshed on the subject of

the half-forgotten legend, in which he apparently took but a languid interest, and the conversation presently drifted to other topics.

After dinner Mrs. Annesley played some sonatas, and Edward sang some songs to her accompaniment till Paul, who had been up the night before, and in the open air all day, sank into a sweet slumber. The other two sat chatting in low tones, Edward describing his life as an artillery officer in a seaport town not far off, discussing his chances of promotion, and his next brother's progress at Woolwich, and hearing of Paul's position, which was not a happy one. Dr. Walter Annesley's partner, who had carried on the business since his death, unluckily died soon after Paul began to practise with him, thus leaving Paul to make his way single-handed. Patients distrusted his youth and went to older men, so that things were not going as smoothly as could be wished, and the practice scarcely paid Paul's personal expenses. So they chatted till the servants appeared, and

Mrs. Annesley read prayers, first asking Paul if he felt equal to performing the task himself after his labours, which he did not.

"Come along and smoke," said Paul with alacrity, when his mother had bidden them good-night. "I smoke in the consulting-room."

"Why there?" asked Edward, doubtfully.

"Well! you see it is the only place. I dare not smoke anywhere else. I tell the patients it insures them against infection, and receive the old ladies in the dining-room. I was nervous about her reception of you. But I see you are in high favour."

"She seems perfectly angelic," replied Edward, selecting a cigar from the box offered him. "By the way, I had no idea she was in delicate health."

Paul laughed. "I doubt if any woman in the three kingdoms enjoys such brilliant health as my dear mother," he replied, "but she is never happy without some fancied ail-

ment. I give her a little coloured water and a few bread pills from time to time."

He did not add that Mrs. Annesley's ailments were in an inverse ratio to her amiability, and formed a good domestic barometer.

Just then there was a tap at the door, and a soft voice said:

"May I come in?"

"Certainly," replied Paul in some trepidation, and his mother entered.

"I will not intrude, dear children," she said; "I merely come to tell Edward on no account to rise for our early breakfast unless he feels quite rested, and to bring him this little gift of my working." She vanished with a "God bless you, dear boys," before her nephew had time to thank her, after which both young men breathed more freely, and Edward took an embroidered tobacco-pouch from his parcel.

"Poke the fire, Ned," Paul said cheerfully, when the door closed after her. Then he opened a closet where stood a skeleton par-

tially draped in a dressing-gown, which the fleshless arm, extended as if in declamation, threw back from the ghastly figure, and crowned by a smoking-cap rakishly tipped on one side on its skull. "Let's be jolly for once, 'have a rouse before the morn.'" He transferred the dressing-gown from the bare bones to his own strong young shoulders, and the cap from the grinning skull to his dark curled brow, beneath which the cruel scar showed. Perhaps it was Edward's fancy, excited by the suggestive revelation of the skeleton, which made the scar appear unusually distinct and livid; perhaps it was only the light.

"How kind of my aunt to make this," he said, looking at the pouch.

"She is kind," commented Paul, his temporary gaiety vanishing as quickly as it came; "no woman has a more heavenly disposition than my dear mother when free from those attacks, which are probably the result of some cerebral lesion."

"Perhaps," Edward suggested hopefully,

"she may grow out of them with advancing years."

"Perhaps," sighed Paul. "But all the Mowbrays are the same, you know. It is in the blood. My uncle Ralph Mowbray was offended with my father once, and he laid awake at nights for six weeks concocting the most stinging phrases he could think of for a letter he wrote him. I'll show you that letter some day."

"Well! I hope it will never break out in you, Paul," said Edward, incautiously.

"I, my dear fellow?" replied Paul, with his good-tempered smile, "there is no fear for me. I am a pure-bred Annesley."

"Ah!" said Edward, looking reflectively at the fire.

"There has not been a serious explosion since New Year's Eve," continued Paul, clasping his hands above his head, and looking at the chimney-piece, which was adorned with a centrepiece of a skull and cross-bones, flanked by several stethoscopes and other mysterious and wicked-looking instruments, and above

which was the smiling portrait of a lovely little girl, with a strong likeness to Mrs. Annesley. "You know how I valued the Parian Psyche of Thorwaldsen's you gave me? She knew it, for she took it in both hands and dashed it on the hearth."

Edward again felt cold chills creeping over him, and his gaze followed Paul's to the dimpled child-face he had loved, Paul's only sister Nellie, whose end had been so tragic.

"And what did you do?" he asked.

"Oh! I just sent the Crown Derby tea-service after it," replied Paul, "so pray don't notice the absence of either."

"She valued the tea-service," said Edward, inwardly thankful that the fiery Mowbray blood did not flow in his veins.

"Imagine the smash," said Paul, pensively. "And the deed was scarcely done, when the door is opened, and in walks the vicar and stares aghast at the Lares and Penates shattered on the drawing-room hearth. My mother turns to him with the most heavenly smile and wishes him a Happy New Year.

'And just see what that clumsy boy of mine has done,' she adds quietly, pointing to the fragments. 'Quite a genius for upsetting things, dear child.'"

"'I thought I heard something fall,' replies the innocent vicar, quoting the line about 'mistress of herself though China fall,' and congratulating me on having a mother with such a sweet temper."

Edward mused for some time on the misery of his cousin's life, a misery rarely alluded to by Paul himself, and any allusion to which on Edward's part he would have deeply resented. He knew that the chain must be pressing heavily for him thus to disburden himself, and he suggested that he should marry and have a quiet home of his own; to which Paul replied mournfully, that he was not yet in a position to set up housekeeping.

"Though indeed——" he added, and suddenly stopped.

"Well?"

"It seems so brutal to build on a baby's death," he replied; "and yet——"

"It alters your position, Paul," said Edward, "and being sentimental about it won't keep the baby alive."

"True."

"I think I may assume that the 'unexpressive She' has already been found," Edward said, remembering the dark hints during dinner, and Paul smiled mysteriously.

"Perhaps I may meet her at Arden?" Edward added.

"Who knows? But I have never yet spoken. I am not entitled by my prospects to do so. I don't know if I have the smallest chance. And when you see her, Ned," he added, with some hesitation, "perhaps you will remember——"

Edward burst out laughing and grasped his cousin's hand.

"Don't be afraid," he replied, "I am not a lady's man; and if I were, Aphrodite herself would not tempt me to spoil other people's little games."

"Remember your promise," said Paul solemnly, and they separated for the night,

Edward wishing his cousin success, and thinking as he took his way upstairs that whatever Miss Sibyl Rickman's character might be, the Rickman blood was reputed to be an eminently mild and tranquil fluid, well calculated to temper the fire of such of the terrible Mowbray strain as might have been transmitted to Paul.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEET.

When Paul Annesley appeared at breakfast next morning he had a heavy look, and yawned a good deal, for which he apologized, observing casually that he had been called up at two in the morning, and only got home at six.

Mrs. Annesley's comment upon this was a tranquil remark that it usually occurred three nights running; but Edward, whose deep slumbers had been invaded once or twice by sounds which roused him sufficiently to make him wonder if he had fallen asleep in the guard-house, questioned his cousin, and learned that he had ridden five miles on the cob he had used the day before, to a cottage in a dell, which could be approached only by

a footpath; that he had tied the Admiral to a gate in a field, and left him while he visited the patient, who died.

In the meantime, the horse had broken loose, and after a long and tantalizing chase round the field, Paul dropped and broke his lantern, wandered knee-deep into a pool of water, and slipped down once or twice; after which he decided to walk home through the dark, drizzling morning, leaving the provoking steed to his fate. This proved to be nothing more dreadful than being captured at daylight by the patient's husband, and led back to Medington, whither the widower was bound for various sad necessities. He now stood, with the animal before the door, even while the cousins were talking, a picture of homely tragedy.

In spite of these nocturnal adventures, Paul was bent on going to the meet, which was at the "Travellers' Rest," on Arden Down that day; he was further bent on Edward's accompanying him, though a search through the livery stables of Medington

resulted in the production of nothing better than an immense gaunt old chestnut, which had once seen good days, requiring some moral courage to ride. Paul, with a truly heroic magnanimity, offered his cousin his own little thorough-bred, Diana, whom he loved like a child; but Edward, with scarcely less heroism, declined, and the cousins started off on their dissimilar steeds.

As they trotted quietly along, Paul stopping occasionally to visit a patient, Edward thought a good deal about him and his mother. What a good fellow he was, how cheerfully he faced the hardships of his lot, and, above all, what an excellent son he was to that very trying mother! Few sons were so much loved as he, and his affection for his mother was deep and strong. He must have been very desperate when he smashed the tea-service; it was the sole passionate outbreak on his part of which he had heard.

He thought of his own kind and sweet-tempered mother, also a widow, and to whom

his conscience told him he was not as dutiful as Paul to his wayward parent, and wondered how it would have fared with himself, had his father married Eleanor Mowbray, as family tradition, confirmed by gentle Mrs. Edward Annesley's severe strictures on Mrs. Walter, reported that he had wished to do.

Over the chimney-piece in his bed-room at Medington was a portrait of Eleanor Mowbray which haunted him. It was taken at the time of her marriage, and represented a lovely girl in the childish costume of early Victorian days, with arch blue eyes peeping out from between two bunches of curls in front of the cheeks. He had gazed, fascinated, upon it, vainly trying to detect the lurking demon behind the angel semblance.

He was on a visit to Medington when Nellie's death occurred. The child, then twelve years old, on being severely and unduly scolded for some slight fault by her mother, who was chasing her from place to place, harassed at last beyond endurance, had turned, seized a brush from the hall

table, and thrown it at Mrs. Annesley. Edward was standing by.

"Undutiful child! You have killed me! You are unfit to live. Never let me see you again!" the mother burst out with fierce vehemence.

The child took her at her word, and ran out of the garden door; Edward never would forget her white face as she turned before disappearing.

Next morning he saw her slight body borne drowned into that hall. She had not been missed; being in disgrace she was supposed to be hiding about the house somewhere, until she was found by the river side, and thus tragically brought home.

Were there other demons lurking unseen behind other angel faces? he wondered. Did Eleanor Annesley in those innocent bridal days dream of what she was capable? did she even now realise the horror of the thing which at times possessed her? Paul, though he had "sent the tea-service after" the Psyche, did not dream that the curse of the

Mowbrays had fallen on himself. For not only is each human being an enigma to his fellows, a dark mystery fenced about on every side by impassable limits which obscure his nature almost as effectually as Sigfrid's Tarnkappe, or Cloak of Darkness, did the hero's bodily presence, but, what is still stranger, each is an insoluble mystery to himself. No one can tell how he will act in unforeseen circumstances, which may prove the touchstone to reveal unsuspected qualities; nay, even when the fierce discipline of life has brought many unexpected features to light, and a long record of good and ill is written on the memory, who can analyse the motives, mixed as they must be, which prompted those deeds?

Paul in the meantime was haunted by the vision of Alice, sitting in the carved oak seat beneath the armour, with the hound at her knee, in the fire-lit hall, and considering if he could manage to have himself landed at Arden Manor before the end of the day; for the days on which he did not

see her became more and more flat and unprofitable.

> "Except I be by Sylvia in the night,
> There is no music in the nightingale ;
> Unless I look on Sylvia in the day,
> There is no day for me to look upon."

Then he mused upon the news he heard there, and thought how it would have been with him, had Reginald's baby not been born. His prospects were so dark, he could not help thinking of Edward's happier circumstances, his more agreeable life and comparative wealth.

Now the chestnut pricked up his ears and looked about him with a joyous excitement, which rivalled Diana's own youthful ardour, and they knew that the hounds were near ; Paul pressed on through the ever-growing stream of horses and carriages to see his patient, leaving his cousin to follow at leisure.

In spite of the leaden sky and thick moist air, which obscured all but near objects, the

desolate spot on which the lonely inn was built looked gay and animated this morning. In front of the low stone wall of the courtyard moved the parti-coloured mass of hounds, their sterns waving with half-suppressed enthusiasm; out of their midst rose the huntsman on his bright bay; his scarlet coat emphasized by the grey background of the inn. That awful personage, the Master, splendidly mounted and brightly clad, with a world of care on his brow, was exchanging polite commonplaces with gentlemen, to some of whom his expressions later in the day would be less civil and more forcible. The mass of riders wore dark coats, but the proportion of red was enough to brighten the whole picture. Four or five farmers on good horses of their own breeding, two or three beautifully equipped county gentlemen, a few ladies, some half-dozen nondescript riders, including a clergyman, who said he was only looking on, a rabble of boys, with half-a-dozen officers from regiments stationed near, made up the field. A barouche, two landaus,

three waggonettes, a few phaetons, gigs and dogcarts, an empty coal-waggon and a butcher's cart, were drawn up in the road, and Edward vainly scanned the ladies in these vehicles in search of the object of Paul's affection.

Then he glanced at the solitary inn, and thought of the suffering that a thin wall separated from the animated group of pleasure seekers. Reuben Gale was walking Diana up and down, and exchanging pleasantries with the whip. His father was leaning on the low wall, with an empty pewter-pot in his hand, enjoying the scene just as if his daughter were not dying and he had not all those graves down in Arden churchyard. People were laughing, chatting and smoking; horses were champing their bits, and sidling and stamping with the exultation of the coming hunt. The warm, damp air was laden with the scent of opening buds, trampled turf and trodden earth; luscious flute-notes of thrushes and the tender coo-coo of wood-pigeons came from the

copses below and mingled with the occasional neigh of a horse or whine of a hound. There was a joyous thrill of expectancy that made Edward forget his steed's shortcomings, and neither he nor anyone else thought of the background of tragedy which shadowed every human being present.

Among the horses was a beautiful white Arab, easily distinguished by the characteristic spring of the tail from the haunches, and Edward observed the animal with such interest that he did not notice the rider. The latter, however, pressed his knees into the Arab, and sprang forward so suddenly that the excited Larry backed into an unpretending phaeton, containing an old gentleman and a young lady. He caught the flash of a pair of dark eyes, as he turned after getting free, and apologized, and then found himself accosted by the Arab's rider, a Highland officer of his acquaintance, who bestowed some ironical praise upon the unlucky Larry.

Edward laughed, and explained that it was Hobson's choice.

Captain McIlvray regretted that he had not known in time to offer him a mount. "But, my dear fellow," he added in his affected drawl, "you said you were staying at Medington."

"Yes, I am staying with some friends who live there."

"Really," returned the Highlander, "do you mean to say that anybody *lives* in that beastly hole?"

"Some few thousand people live there, I believe."

"Ah! you mean, Annesley, that they don't quite die there, eh?" he asked, not at once seeing the rebuke.

"I mean that they live pleasant and profitable lives there," he replied, wondering if Paul's life were either pleasant or profitable.

Captain McIlvray appeared to muse in some wonder upon this assertion, while a humorous twinkle in his eye showed that he was conscious of his own affectation and of

Edward's irritation over it. But he did not yet see that he had been rude.

"And who are the virtuous people who live the supewior lives in the stweets of Medington?" he continued, determined not to be put down, and thus emphasizing the first discourtesy.

"Paul Annesley, my cousin, a doctor," Edward answered, in the neutral tones which best rebuke rudeness; "that brown mare with black points is his; he is visiting a patient in the inn there," he added, seeing that Captain McIlvray perceived at last that he had made a mistake. "He doesn't pretend to hunt, but says he can't help it if the hounds will run in front of him."

"Vewy good weasoning, vewy clever mare," the Highland officer said. "No idea you had friends there. Thought it was an inn."

Then he asked to be introduced to the cousin, just as Paul came up on Diana, and Edward introduced them.

"And now, Edward," said Paul, after a

few words, "I must re-introduce you to some old friends."

And, turning, he led him up to the very phaeton into which the chestnut had just backed, and the owner of the dark eyes, who had unavoidably heard every word that had passed between the two officers, proved to be no other than Sibyl Rickman.

"I should never have known you for our old friend, Sibbie," he said with unaffected admiration. Then the pack moved off to the copse below the inn, and the phaeton was drawn with the two horsemen into the moving stream which followed it, so that he had only time to observe a pretty voice and laugh, an animated face and an easily excited blush, as the charms which won Paul's heart.

But Sibyl, having overheard his conversation with the Highland officer, formed an estimate of his character which she never altered. She mused on it while talking at the cover-side to Paul, when Edward was renewing his acquaintance with Mr. Rickman. It seemed to the dreamy imaginative Sibyl

that so fine a vision of young manhood had never before been revealed to her. His very gesture when he patted the neck of the despised old horse went to her heart, and remained there for ever.

The air was now alive with expectation; the eager cry of a hound broke out and set the horses' ears quivering; the plaintive sound of the horn was heard; whips cracked like pistol-shots in the heart of the wood; the last cover hack was exchanged for a hunter, girths were tightened, bits examined, cigars thrown away and conversation became spasmodic. Again the passionate cry of a hound, another and another, then silence; more horn blowing, more pistol cracks, and demoniac yells from human lungs, finally the full triumphant chorus of the pack.

Then a strange jumble of sounds and excitement, a general stampede of saddle-horses, all kinds of misbehaviour on the part of those in harness, a universal madness seizing man and beast, and the cover-side in a few moments is deserted, riders streaming across

the fields, and carriages along the nearest high-road, because a small reddish-brown animal with a bushy tail has just whisked cautiously out from the far side of the coppice, looking behind him with a sagacious grin, and rejoicing that the nearest muzzle sniffing his trail is a good way behind.

Straight along the valley beneath the down flashed Reynard, and what he thought of the splendid canine chorus behind him, and whether he appreciated the melody of the fine pack and was soothed to find them "matched in mouth like bells," unfortunately nobody knows. Yet one cannot help thinking that it must be a fine thing to dart away thus at full stretch, and by the exercise of all one's powers to strain and perhaps baffle all that tremendous following of instinct, strength and skill; to fight alone—one small, solitary animal—all those trained monsters in the chiming pack, those gigantic, high-mettled steeds, and that great army of thinking men. At all events this particular fox, rejoicing that his last meal had been oppor-

tunely timed to put him in trim for the run, laid his legs to the ground smartly, and gallantly resolved, if it came to the worst, to die hard.

On dashed the hounds, mad with exultation, uttering their wild music; on thundered the field, horses and men alike intoxicated with the chase, and neither thinking of Reynard's sensations. Now the Master's face is aflame with wrath and his denunciations are loud and pungent, as some recklesss rider blunders over the hindmost hounds; the huntsman and the whip are alive in every nerve; the best riders are restraining the eagerness of their steeds; field after field is swallowed up, hedge and ditch and brook are cleared, with every field the hunt is drawn out into a longer and thinner stream; timid riders are seen scrambling along hedge-rows in search of gates and gaps; there lies a horse, hoofs uppermost, and near him his rider with red coat all tarnished, and once spotless breeches stained with mud. There is a cry of "Ware wheat!" that cunning little brown beast has

bolted straight across a field of young corn. On he dashes, less hindered by obstacles than any other member of the hunt, which perhaps makes him grin so sardonically as he flies.

The carriages see most of the fun from the high road; but now the hunt has vanished from their view, and spectators can only form shrewd guesses as to the whereabouts of the pack, and tyros are beginning to find that hunting is more complicated than it seems.

Paul and Diana have gone as straight as any bird; only once did they swerve aside, and that was to avoid over-riding Captain McIlvray, whom they observed sitting with an air of bewilderment in the middle of a field, whither his horse (who, after coming down on his nose, was now picking himself up and continuing his course riderless and undaunted) had pitched him while taking a stiff fence. Nothing but delight reigns now in Paul's breast: neither the shadow of the Mowbray temper nor the glory of Alice Lingard's presence in the fire-lit hall affects

him, and when he sees another man flying out of his saddle he is half angry lest he should have contrived to break some bone and so need his aid. But the man knows how to fall, and is soon mounted again, followed by McIlvray, who has escaped with a few bruises, on his recaptured Arab.

As for Larry, he and his rider alike forgot his advanced age in the first burst of joyous excitement, and pounded over a field or two, taking a moderate fence, with the best. But at the second fence, a good strong bullfinch, horse and rider, dreadfully mixed up, came rolling down the opposite bank together, and Edward had to execute a vigorous roll of his own devising to get free of Larry's hoofs. The old horse appeared none the worse for his tumble, and the rider, finding that his own bones were intact, went on with moderate ardour, seeking gates and gaps in fences. What with these delays, and the necessity of going softly lest Larry should come down again, Edward was more than once thrown out, finding the trail again by dint of observa-

tion and surmise, and finally found himself a solitary rider on the slope of the down, with a spent horse, and the hounds nowhere. "Poor old fellow!" he said, patting Larry's hot wet neck, as he walked quietly along, "I doubt if any horse has done so gallantly as you to-day. You gave me the best you could, and now we will jog quietly home."

But the thing was to find a road; and they went through a couple of fields without seeing a living creature or discovering any means of reaching the high-road Edward knew to lie along the valley. The rain had cleared off, the breath of primroses and violets came deliciously on the moist, mild, spring air, and the larks sang in distracting raptures and whirls of song.

The next field showed a pretty sight. It was fresh ploughed, and the scent of the warm earth rose from its symmetrical furrows, along which came, with rapid, even strides, a man bearing on his left arm a wooden basket of peculiar shape into which he continually dipped his right hand, and, with an in-

describably graceful movement, rhythmically matched to the motion of his steps, scattered a shower of seed-corn over the gaping furrows. It was delightful to watch this man, in his skilled strength and unconscious dignity, striding with swift even step and swift even sweep of the right arm up and down the ridge of lines, exactly throwing his golden rain with strenuous but regulated toil.

The sower paused and breathed while he refilled his basket from a sack standing upright in the field, and started off again, followed by a couple of horses and a man with a harrow to rake the seed into the soil. This man moved more leisurely, cracked his whip cheerily, and whistled a mellow note when not uttering strange sounds to his horses, and of him Edward asked the nearest way to Medington.

Having reached the end of the furrow, the man with the harrow caused his steeds to stop, and, taking off his cap and burying his fingers in his curls, looked with a perplexed air up and down and all round in profound silence

for some moments. One might suppose that he was silently invoking the inspiration of some deity. Then he observed cautiously, "Darned if I knows."

"How am I to get down into the high-road then!" asked Edward.

"You med goo over down," continued the man, ignoring the second question, which had scarcely had time to penetrate to the remote regions of his brain, "but 'tis ter'ble hrough. Then agen, you med goo along down hroad."

"Exactly," replied Edward, no wiser than before; "but how am I to get into the road?"

"Zure enough," he returned, addressing the sower, "how be he to get into the hroad?"

"Is there no lane?" asked Annesley, looking at the maze of fields between himself and the far-distant road in the valley.

"Ay," replied the sower, who was resting now, and bringing out his dinner from a bundle, "you'll zoon vind he. Goo on athirt them turmuts; there's a lane over thay-urr."

And he pointed his thumb vaguely over his shoulder.

He rode athwart the turnips accordingly, not knowing that the sower considered "over there," with a westward direction of the thumb, sufficient indication of the whereabouts of America, found a gate, and at last came upon a steep furzy slope the other side of the turnip-field. The ground gradually became rougher and steeper, and suddenly he found himself rapidly descending an almost perpendicular slope, which the curve of the ground had hidden from him. He was just going to dismount, when he was relieved from that necessity by the sudden collapse of Larry, who stumbled over a rabbit-hole, and came crashing down head over heels, and rolled in a most complicated manner to the bottom; while Edward, on finding himself shot over Larry's head, instinctively guided his own rolls out of the horse's orbit, and, arriving at the bottom by a separate track, kept his bones unbroken.

The chestnut, less fortunate than his rider,

was cut on his shoulder and knee, and presented a melancholy spectacle when he scrambled to his feet, and set about to console himself by browsing on the short turf near him; and Edward, reflecting that hunting on a worn-out hack has its drawbacks, began to wonder what was to be done next.

CHAPTER V.

SPRING FLOWERS.

He found the high-road at last and a cottage, where he turned in and washed and bandaged Larry's knee. Then he set off on the road to Medington on foot, as fast as the woful limp of the unlucky chestnut would permit, with the bridle over his arm, and cheerily trolling out reminiscences of the Bay of Biscay. The road was long, the Bay of Biscay came to an end, and Larry heard with interest all about Tom Bowling, whose "soul is gone aloft."

Presently they reached a little village of thatched cottages in gardens, dotted on either side of the road, and there beneath the slope of the down Edward recognized the low square tower of Arden Church, with the

manor house just beyond it, and burst out lustily with "'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay."

"For England, Home, and Beauty," repeated the singer in softer notes, wondering if the "Golden Horse," picturesquely shaded by a row of sycamore-trees, furnished good ale (for it was now quite hot and the sun was struggling through the clouds), when he saw a phaeton approaching the turning to the Manor, and recognized the dark flash of Sibyl Rickman's eyes.

The phaeton pulled up. Mr. Rickman condoled with him upon his melancholy plight, and bade him turn in to Arden at once; to which Edward at first demurred, averring that he was not presentable.

That difficulty was soon got over. Larry was comfortably stabled; it was agreed that his owner should send for him later. A little soap and water and a borrowed coat, made Edward quite presentable, and his host, surveying him with satisfaction, and observing that he had grown a good deal since he last saw him, conducted him along a panelled

corridor to the drawing-room, a cheerful apartment in white painted wainscot, with an oriel window looking southward on a sunny old-fashioned garden, which was even now bright with early spring flowers.

The sun had at last burst through the clouds, and, as the drawing-room door opened, a flood of sunshine poured through the oriel upon his face, half blinding him for a moment. Then he saw Mrs. Rickman at work in an easy-chair by the fire, and near her Sybil with a book, looking, now that she had put off her wraps, the pretty, graceful creature she was.

Having spoken to Mrs. Rickman, he turned once more to the light, vaguely conscious of a disturbing presence in that direction, and there, rising from her seat beneath the glowing oriel window at a table on which she was arranging some flowers in vases, with the rich sunshine calling out all the gold tints in her brown hair, and making a tiny halo about her head, he saw Alice Lingard.

He stood still, and fixed a long, earnest

gaze upon her, not at first noticing Mrs. Rickman's introduction of "Miss Lingard, our adopted daughter," while a sudden light irradiated Alice's eyes and a warm glow suffused her face. In one hand she held some daffodils; as she rose, she overturned a basketful at her feet, and from the folds of her dress there glided primroses, violets and other spring flowers, of which the bowls and vases on the table before her were full.

> "O Proserpina,
> For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou let'st fall
> From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
> That die unmarried, ere they can behold
> Bright Phœbus in his strength."

They were all there, those delicate flowers of hope and spring for which Perdita longed, to give to her young prince; they made a fit setting for the young and gracious creature

who rose from their midst, scattering them as she rose.

Her clear, tranquil gaze met the stranger's frankly for a moment, while a slight tremor made the slender daffodils quiver in her hand; but his long and silent glance in no way offended her, nor did it strike anyone else as disrespectful. It was as if he had been gazing all his life at that sweet vision among sunshine and flowers; yet everything within him seemed to die and be born again as he gazed; life became glorious and full of dim, delicious mystery in the sudden stir of intense feeling. He did not say, "This woman shall be mine," for he felt that she was his and he was hers for ever and ever.

Then he became aware that in rising she had overturned the basket of flowers, and after the silent reverence which he made on being introduced, his first action was to kneel before her and restore the scattered flowers to their places.

"It is a sudden leap from winter to spring, from the wet morning with the hounds to all

these flowers and sunshine," he said, as he handed her a mass of blue violets.

"Yes, the spring always comes suddenly upon us, when it does come," Alice replied, grouping the violets.

"But, unluckily, it does not always stay," broke in Mr. Rickman, in his rough voice, which resembled the rasping of a chair drawn over a stone floor; "even the Italians, who know what spring really means, the spring northern poets dream about and never see, have a proverb to that effect; about the first swallow, Sibbie, my dear."

"Nobody wants our musty old proverbs, papa," replied Sibyl, with a graceful impertinence that always pleased her indulgent father, "Mr. Annesley would far rather have some dinner."

"Perhaps he would like some violets as a welcome back to Arden, Alice," suggested Mrs. Rickman. "Those grey Neapolitans are the sweetest. I can scarcely believe this is little Ned Annesley shot up so tall."

"There, Mr. Annesley," Alice said, handing

him a bunch of double violets, "I present you with the freedom of Arden. Miss Rickman should have done it as the real daughter of the house." She looked up with a frank smile, which made him feel as we do in dreams when we light upon some long-lost treasure and imagine that an end has now come to all care.

Mr. Rickman began to discourse, in his harsh yet kindly voice, upon the extensive use of flowers in the religious and civil life of the ancient Greeks, and Edward smiled to himself when he recalled Gervase's schemes in schoolboy days to start his father on an absorbing monologue, and so divert his attention at critical moments. Mr. Rickman had not changed in the least; his small, keen, blue eye was just as bright, his face as dried-up and lined, his slight, wiry figure had the same scholar's stoop, and his manner was as absent and dreamy as in those boyish days.

Soon they found themselves at table in the dark, oak-panelled dining-room, but it seemed

less dark than when Edward had last seen it; the pictures, with their fine mellow gloom, still hung dusky in the darkness; but some silver sconces and bits of old china brightened the walls; a vase holding daffodils made a lustre against a black panel and harmonized with a blue china bowl of the same flowers on the table. Yet not these trifles alone brightened the darkness of that familiar old room.

"Yes," replied Mr. Rickman, when Annesley said something about the unaccustomed brightness the flowers wrought; "the feminine eye is ever seeking the ornamental. My daughters are occupied from morning till night in trying to beautify everything. Happily they do not seek to improve my appearance"—this was too evident—"and respect the sanctity of my study——"

"The dirt of his den," interrupted Sibyl.

"The whole of human history is permeated by this peculiarity of the female mind," continued Mr. Rickman, abstractedly gazing into space; "all legend is pervaded by it. I pur-

pose one day to bring out a paper on the 'Influence of the Feminine Love of Ornament upon the Destinies of the Human Race.' My paper will embrace a very wide range of thought. I suppose there is no period of human history when the feminine desire to wear clothes did not manifest itself; the passion for improving upon the workmanship of nature by art is evinced to-day in the rudest savage tribes as well as in the highest circles of European fashion. A necklace has in all nations been the most elementary article of female attire; a woman paints her face and tattoos her body long before she arrives at the faintest rudiment of a petticoat. I need not remind my readers,—I mean you, my dears, and Annesley—of the part a necklace played in the tremendous drama of the French Revolution, and there are numerous episodes in that sanguinary tragedy——"

"But we can't dine on a sanguinary tragedy, papa," said Sibyl; for, having started himself upon a congenial topic, her father had laid down his knife and fork, and

with folded hands was placidly contemplating the joint rapidly cooling before him.

"True, my dear, very true, I had forgotten the dinner," he replied, with his accustomed meekness, while hastening to carve the joint; "the female mind—but perhaps, Annesley, the female mind may not interest you. At all events you can read my notes upon the subject later, and you may be able to furnish me with the results of your own experience in that branch of study."

In spite of his pedantry, Mr. Rickman was in Annesley's dazzled eyes a charming and interesting old man, with his stores of out-of-the-way knowledge and his simplicity concerning the things of every-day life. Mrs. Rickman seemed the most loveable old lady, as she truly was, and Sibyl the wittiest and prettiest of sprightly maidens: the simple food before him might have been a banquet, the Arden home-brewed ale was a drink for gods. It is difficult for cold blood to realize the enchantment that fell upon him, the kind of enchantment

that makes everything around one charming, oneself included.

He could not tear himself away. After dinner his host, finding him so good a listener, took him to his study and showed him his treasures—coins, gems and antiquities; but when these were exhausted, he lingered still as if spell-bound, apparently listening to the notes of a piano sounding through the house. Some instinct told him that Alice's hand was evoking the solemn harmony.

She continued to play when he entered the drawing-room whither his host led him, looking up to ask if they "minded the music." He took a seat by Sibyl, his eyes following the slender fingers which drew the living music from the passive keys, and his mind full of unspeakable thoughts. Then she sang the beautiful song—

> "Tell me, my heart, why morning's prime
> Looks like the fading eve,"—

which is like the long-drawn sigh of an excessive happiness, and he listened in ever-growing delight. Sibyl looked at him once during the

music and a strange feeling came over her; his face was like that of a St. George she had seen pictured somewhere, so rapt and earnest.

Then, at Mrs. Rickman's request, Sibyl sang, to Alice's accompaniment, the following song:—

"Once have I seen and shall love her for ever;
For the soul that glanced from her eyes to mine
Is lovely and sweet as its delicate shrine;
But once have I seen and must love her for ever,
All my heart to her resign;
Though never for me her eyes may shine,
Though never perchance may I divine
How 'tis when lives together twine,
Since once I have seen I must love her for ever."

Still he lingered, though the afternoon, which grew more balmy and beautiful towards its close, was wearing away, and one of the girls opened the window wide to let in the sunny air, and he knew that he ought to go.

"And is Raysh Squire alive?" he asked, seeking some excuse for lingering. "I should like to see the old fellow again."

"You may hear him at the present moment,

ringing your poor cousin's knell," said Sibyl, calling his attention to the tolling from the steeple near, which had not ceased since he approached the village, though it had been but faintly heard through the closed windows, and Mr. Rickman suggested that the ladies should take their guest to the belfry and reintroduce him, a proposition Edward eagerly seconded.

Even while they spoke, Raysh Squire came to the end of his monotonous and melancholy office in the chill belfry, and went out into the afternoon sunshine, stretching his stiffened arms and yawning. As he did so, he saw a figure in shirt-sleeves by a barrow on the other side of the churchyard wall in the vicarage grounds, stretching his arms and yawning with equal intensity, and since nothing fosters friendship like a community of interests and occupation, this sympathetic sight moved him to drag his slow steps across the mounded turf to that quarter, and, resting his arms on the wall, to look over it, just as the figure in shirt-sleeves, which was that of a

young and stalwart man, executed a final yawn of surpassing excellence, and, seating himself on the barrow, began to fill a short pipe.

"Warm," said the sexton, a long, wiry, bony figure, with a fleshless face, black hair, and whiskers touched with grey.

"Warmish," replied the gardener slowly, without raising his eyes from the turf on which he was gazing, while he kindled the pipe he held in the hollow of his hands.

Then the sexton, turning round towards his cottage, which stood at the churchyard gate, beckoned to his grandchild to bring him the mug she held in her hand, which contained his "four o'clock," a modest potation of small beer.

"Buryen' of mankind, Josh Baker," said the sexton, after applying himself to this refreshing cup, and thus concealing his features for some moments, "is a dryen traäde."

"Ay," returned the gardener, after slowly and solemnly surveying the sexton's withered

features for some time, "you looks dried, Raysh Squire." Then he withdrew his gaze and puffed with long, slow puffs at his pipe, bending forwards, his arms resting on his legs, which were stretched out apart before him, and his hands clasped together.

"Buryen' of mankind," continued Raysh, after a thoughtful pause, during which he sought fresh inspiration from the "four o'clock," "is a ongrateful traäde. Vur why? Volk never thanks anybody fur putting of 'em underground."

Josh pushed his felt hat back on his yellow curls, and apparently made a strong effort to take in this strikingly new idea for a moment or two, after which he replied, "I never yeard o' nobody returning thanks vur the buryen', not as I knows on, I haint."

"No, Josh Baker, and I war'nt you never will, wuld boans as you med make. A ongrateful traäde is buryen', a ongrateful traäde."

"I hreckon you've put a tidy lot under-

ground, Master Squire," said the gardener, after a pause.

"Hreckon, I hev, Josh," returned the sexton, with a slow lateral extension of the lines in his withered face, resembling a smile. "Hreckon I've putt more underground than you ever drawed out on't, aye, or ever wull. I've putt a power o' quality underground, let alone the common zart. Wuld passon, I buried he, and the Lard knows where I be to putt this here one, the ground's that vull. Eln Gale, she's a gwine up under tree, there. I showed her the plaäce; 'And I'll do ee up comfortable, Eln,' I zays. 'Thankee kindly, Master Squire,' zes she; 'you allas stood my vriend,' she zes. 'Ay, and I allays ool, Eln,' zays I, 'and I'll do ee up proper and comfortable, and won't putt nobody along zide of ee this twenty year to come.' 'Thankee kindly, Master Squire,' she zes, ''tis pleasant and heartsome up under tree where the pimroses blows, and you allays stood my vriend.' There ain't a many like Eln. A

ongrateful traäde is buryen' and a dryin' traäde."

"You ain't ben' burying of this yer Capen Annesley, Raysh," objected the gardener after some thought. "How be um to bury he, if so be as he's yet by a elephant?"

"Hreckon they'll hae to bury the elephant, Josh Baker, if so be they haes Christian buryen in they outlandish plaäces o' the yearth. I've been a hringen' of 'en out vur dree martial hours, and I've a done what I could vor 'n, I caint do no more. I hringed 's grandfather out, and 's brothers, hringed 'em out mezelf, and terble dry work 'twas. Ay, I've pretty nigh hringed 'em all out. Annesleys is come to their last end."

He illustrated this melancholy assertion by a final application to the "four o'clock," having brought which to its last end, he handed the mug to the little wide-eyed grandchild, who trotted off with it.

"This yere doctor o' ourn's a Annesley; there's he left," objected the gardener.

"There's Annesleys, and there's Annesleys, Josh Baker. Zame as wi' apples, there's Ribstone Pippins and there's Codlings. They Medington Annesleys is a common zart," said the sexton, his voice conveying severe rebuke for the gardener's ignorance, mingled with compassion for his youth. "Ay, Josh Baker, this yere's a knowledgeable world, terble knowledgeable world 'tis to be zure."

The gardener was too much crushed by this combination of axiom and illustration to make any reply, beyond hazarding the observation, "Codlings biles well," which was frowned down, so he continued to smoke steadily, with his eyes fixed on three daisies before him, while the scent of his tobacco, which was a doubtful odour, mingled with the scent of the mown grass in his barrow with most agreeable results.

The sexton meanwhile leant upon the mossed stone wall, enjoying the double pleasure of successful controversy within and the warmth of the March sunbeams with-

out, and listened with vague delight to the rich flute-notes of a blackbird near, till the click of the churchyard wicket made him turn his head in that direction and walk slowly thither, while the gardener still more slowly rose and wheeled his barrow with its fragrant burden to its destination.

"Afternoon," growled Raysh, pulling his hair slightly as he approached the ladies from the Manor, and looking at them as much as to say, "What do you want now?"

"You may as well look pleasant if you can, Raysh," said Sibyl; "we have only brought you an old friend."

"You don't remember me, Master Squire, I daresay," said Annesley. "I was here as a boy with Mr. Gervase Rickman and my cousin, Paul Annesley."

"I minds ye well enough," replied Raysh. "Master Eddard you be, and a terble bad buoy you was to be zure. You and t'others, between ye, pretty nigh gallied

me to death. Not as I bears no malice, bless 'ee. Buoys is made a purpose to tarment mankind, zame as malleyshags * and vlays, and buoys they'll be till kingdom come, I hreckon."

"I fear we did lead you a life of it. I seem to remember getting into the tower and ringing the bells at some unholy hour."

"D'ye mind how I whacked ye vor't?" replied the old man, brightening at the recollection. "You minds, Miss Sibyl; you zeen me laying the stick athirt the shoulders of en' and you zinged out to me to let en off, and I let en off. I'd gin en a pretty penneth avore you come," he added, with satisfaction.

"And I had forgotten this service, Miss Rickman," said Annesley, laughing. "Perhaps some day I may repay the debt, though not in kind. Can we get into the church, Raysh?"

"You med get into church if you'd got ar a kay," replied the old man; "but if you

* Caterpillars.

aint got ar a kay you'll hae to wait till I vetches one vor 'ee."

"He gets more arbitrary every day of his life," explained Sibyl laughing; "and we spoil him more and more."

Alice stopped at the churchyard gate to see the sexton's ailing wife, and this circumstance caused Annesley to hurry through the church with only half an interest in the tombs of his ancestors, who were buried there, and the humours of his old friend Raysh, whose "chrisom" name was Horatio, he told him. He had rung out George the Third, his two sons, and rung in the latter and Queen Victoria, he informed them, evidently thinking that neither of those sovereigns could have quitted this mortal scene without his aid.

"Ryalty," he observed, "takes a power o' hringen, and well wuth it they be. I don't hold with these yer publicans, Mr. Annesley, as wants to do away wi' Queen Victoria. They med zo well let she alone, a lone lorn ooman what have rared nine children. Wants

to make everythink so vlat as the back o' my hand, they publicans doos. Ah, you med take my word vor't, when you begins zetting down what the Lard have made high, you never knows where 't will end. They begin wi' clerks. Thirty-vour year I stood under passun, and eddicated the volk with Amens, and giv out the Psalms what was zung to dree viddles, a clarinet and a bugle, as you med mind when a buoy. And now they've a zet me down long wi the lay volk, as though I wasn't nar a bit better than they. Ay, that's how they began, zure enough, and the Lard only knows where they med end. We caint all on us be Queens, and we caint all on us be clerks, as stands to rayson. Zo those yer Radical chaps they ups and zes, 'we wun't hae no clerks, nor no Queens, nor no nothink,' zes they. Ay, that's how t'es, zure enough."

Annesley replied that, being himself a plain man, whose business it was to serve the Queen, he was no politician, and, having sealed this assertion by the pressure of a

crown-piece into Raysh's fleshless palm, came out of the church, thus leaving a good impression upon the old sexton, who remained behind to tidy up the belfry before finally locking the doors.

CHAPTER VI.

THORNS.

It would have been better if Edward Annesley had resisted the spell which kept him chained to the spot that afternoon; but he did not. He lingered outside the sexton's cottage, waiting for Alice, and talking to Sibyl of the days when they were children.

"We were such extremely tiresome children," Sibyl said, "that I can't help hoping that we have a chance of growing into at least average Christians."

Then it was that some demon inspired him with the notion of forwarding Paul's suit by proxy, and he replied that one of them, namely Paul, had matured into something far beyond the human average, and that all he wanted to bring him to absolute perfection

was a good wife. When he said this he looked straight into Sibyl's bright eyes, but without evoking the embarrassment he expected.

Then he blundered further into some observations upon the wisdom of marrying a friend known from childhood, and said finally that he thought such a friendship the best feeling to marry upon.

"Do you think so?" she returned wistfully, and with the self-forgetfulness which lent such a charm to all she said; "I can't help thinking that *I* should like a little love."

"A little," he echoed, looking with warm admiration at the bright face still so unconscious of itself; "oh! Miss Rickman, it is not a little, but a great deal of love that such a face as yours commands!"—He broke off, feeling that he had blundered seriously. Sibyl bent over a honey plant encrusted with pink-scented blossom, about which the bees from Raysh Squire's hives were humming—an old-fashioned cottage plant, the scent of which ever after stirred unspeakable feelings within

her—for a moment, and then, quickly regaining her composure, replied, "What rubbish we are talking! we want Gervase to put us down with one of his little cynical speeches."

"Has Gervase grown into a cynic?" he asked, wondering how great an ass he had made of himself, and greatly relieved when, the long recital of Grandmother Squire's woes being at last ended, Alice came out from the honeysuckled porch.

"Grandmother Squire is in the loveliest frame of mind to-day, Sibyl," she said. "'Sure enough, Miss Lingard,' she told me, 'we be bound to putt up with Providence, hreumatics and all. Not but what I've a had mercies. There was the twins took off, and what we yarned in the chollery.'"

"Poor old soul!" commented Sybil, as they turned away from the cottage, "her rheumatism does try her. She said only yesterday, 'Raysh is bad enough, and I've a put up with him this vour and vorty year. But Raysh ain't nothing to rheumatics, bless un!' —— Oh!" Sybil's gay voice suddenly

changed to a shriek of terror—"He will be killed!" she cried, and flew down the lane to the high-road, preceded by Annesley, who leapt the gate she was obliged to open, while Alice ran to call Raysh.

At Sibyl's cry, and the grating sound of an overturned vehicle dragged over the gravel, the others turned their faces to the high-road, where they saw a half-shattered dog-cart, jolted along by a powerful iron-grey horse, which was kicking against the ruin at his heels and maddening himself afresh at every kick. At the horse's head, and holding him with a grasp of iron, was Gervase Rickman, hatless and in imminent peril in his backward course, but making his weight tell fully against the plunging horse, whose progress he occasionally arrested altogether for a moment.

He had evidently been struggling for some time with the frightened animal; his face was pale with fatigue, and his hair damp with sweat. At some distance further up the road lay the unfortunate groom, who had been thrown out by the overturn of the vehicle,

and who occasionally got up and tried to walk, and then, throwing up his hands in agony, fell again, hurt in the leg; while Gervase struggled pluckily on, now and then calling for help. Some women came out into the cottage-gardens and shouted the first male name that occurred to them. Joshua Baker came pounding heavily over the vicarage lawn, with widespread arms and an action like that of a runaway cart-horse. Raysh issued from the churchyard with a lengthened but certainly not hurried stride, and arrived in time to bestow his benediction on the cutting of the last strap. Annesley reached the spot first, Sybil and Josh were a good second, and in a few minutes the first comers had cut away the wreck and set the frightened horse free, Gervase still clinging gallantly to the beast's head, in spite of his indignation with Sybil, who tried to help the men, and certainly kept the wreck from falling upon instead of away from the horse, until the creature, released from the clattering encumbrance at his heels, gradually

quieted down, snorting and quivering less and less.

By that time the owner of the equipage came running up from a house beyond the village, where he had been visiting a patient, while the unlucky groom having dozed off in the afternoon stillness, had been taken by surprise when some pigeons flew suddenly up under the horse's nose and started him off. Before the frightened lad could get the reins properly in hand, the headlong course was terminated by a cannon against the bank at the corner, and he was pitched out.

In a very few minutes the wreck was cleared from the road, the runaway led off, the injured lad taken into the "Golden Horse," and attended to by his master, for whom a four-wheel had been got ready, and the Manor party moved off slowly homewards.

Annesley forgot his prejudice against the "squint-eyed fellow" of the previous day; he could not have renewed his acquaintance with Rickman, whom he had last seen a lad in

his teens, under better circumstances. His heart warmed towards the sturdy figure he had seen putting out all his strength against the great horse, with eyes glowing with courage and determination and every nerve instinct with vigour and gallantry.

"Well, Annesley," Gervase said, with a careless laugh, when they had reached the house, "perhaps you ought to know that you have been playing the Good Samaritan to Paul's most deadly foe. You may have heard of some of the misdoings of Davis. No? Then you will before long."

"I thought I knew the man," Annesley replied. "What! not the son of old Dr. Davis, he looks too old? Why does Paul dislike him? He seemed a good fellow."

"That old look is the head and front of his offending. He gets all Paul's patients by it. It is hard upon Annesley, who has twice his brains and education. He studied at Paris, as you know, after walking the London hospitals, while Davis scrambled through his course as best he could, and took a second-

rate Scotch degree. Yet Davis succeeds; he so thoroughly looks the family doctor, and was an aged man in his teens. Paul is rich in legends of the atrocities committed by Davis through ignorance and stupidity."

Annesley replied that Paul's youthful looks did not seem a sufficient set-off against skill and science; but Rickman explained that other things were against Paul. "You may have noticed," he added, "that he has an unlucky habit of speaking the truth; he has never mastered the truism that language is given us to conceal our thoughts."

Edward had observed his cousin's bad habit, but did not see how it could affect his success.

"My dear Annesley," returned Rickman, "have you not yet observed men and discovered the fatuity of the truth-speaker? Animals have no language because they have nothing to conceal; they can communicate facts to each other without speech. But men, that is civilized men, only exist by means of concealments; if the savage virtue

of truth prevailed, society would revert to chaos. Now, for instance, Paul is called to a man who is killing himself by drinking spirits; the patient complains of his miseries, and asks what is the matter with him. 'Gin is the matter with you,' replies Paul, 'and if you don't leave it off you will be a dead man before long.' Whereupon Paul is sent off and Davis called in. Davis looks grave and sympathetic; he talks about complications and obscure symptoms, and gives the complaint a Greek name a yard long. 'In the meantime,' he says, 'alcoholic stimulants, even in the most moderate degree, may prove fatal.' Davis has studied the use of speech, Annesley has not."

"I like Paul's way best," Sibyl observed.

"You are a young savage," replied her brother.

"Still, I do not see why Paul should be at odds with Davis," persisted Edward.

"Well! you *are* a refreshing young party!" thought Gervase. "Annesley is jealous," he added aloud—"all the Mowbrays

are. I should like you to observe casually, when you get home, that you met a delightful fellow named Davis, and helped pick up his fragments. You will then hear something not to the doctor's advantage."

"Language is used by some people to conceal their thoughts," commented Annesley. "I suppose, Mrs. Rickman, that you take that grain of salt with your son's statements."

"Always when he indulges his cynical vein," she replied. "But seriously, Mr. Annesley, the name of Davis acts on your cousin—yes, and on Mrs. Annesley—like a red rag on a bull, and people who are intimate with the Annesleys don't visit the Davis set, and the Davis set don't mix with the Annesley set. The medical profession is a jealous one."

"Raysh Squire," Edward replied, "says that jealousy dislodged him from the reading desk. Raysh is as great a politician as ever—doesn't look a day older than he did years ago."

"The old rascal wears well," Gervase added. "He says it is brain that keeps him sweet. Nobody can 'get upsides with' him. Raysh is the only man I ever heard talk sense upon politics."

"Why, Gervase, he is a rank Tory," cried Sibyl, "and you are a Liberal! How can you agree with him?"

"Innocent child! Who said that I agreed with him? I only said he talked sense in politics, which I take care never to do, because people would never listen to me if I did."

"Really, Gervase," said Alice, "I cannot understand your politics. With us you always talk like a Conservative, and yet whenever you write or speak in public you express the most extreme Liberal opinions."

"Party government," replied Gervase slowly, "is a useful machine, but it has its drawbacks. One is that it obliges men to adopt a certain formula of clap-trap and stick to it."

"Just so," said Annesley, rising to take his

leave. "If you want to keep your hands clean, you must leave politics alone."

"I don't believe it," cried Alice warmly. "I cannot believe that honour and honesty are not necessary in the government of a great nation. Men are so weak before evil, so ready to bow down before the mean and base. If they had but the courage to stand up before Wrong and say, 'We will not bow down to it, we do not believe in this god; Right is stronger than Wrong,' what a different world it would be!"

"It would indeed," replied the young men simultaneously, but each with different meaning, and Gervase explained that he was not speaking of ideal politics but of party government—a very different matter. Then Edward took his way homeward, musing upon the sudden fire in Alice, and stirred by her words, though he seemed to listen to Gervase, who walked part of the way with him.

Paul Annesley did not appear until dinner was served; he had been in at the finish of the best run of the season, and on his return

had to make another journey. He was fagged and half-stupid, in poor condition to entertain the small dinner-party before him, which was to be augmented later on by a contingent of young people to tea.

"For Heaven's sake, Ned," he managed to whisper to his cousin, "entertain all these solemnities for me! I am dead-beat, and as stupid as an owl." An order that Edward received and carried out literally.

For a full hour after dinner the wearied doctor could do nothing but yawn, until in desperation he went out of the room and got himself some strong coffee, while his cousin took his place.

Medington parties were not very brilliant, as a rule; the same set of people transplanted from house to house, and going through exactly the same rites and ceremonies at each, produced rather a monotonous effect upon one another; a stranger, and especially a stranger of the sex which is so sadly in the minority in country towns, was a welcome addition to these meetings.

Paul was called out again just after his dose of coffee, and when he returned and entered the room unnoticed, to find people amusing themselves to an unusual degree, himself a nonentity in his own house, and his cousin quite at home in his place, a queer feeling came over him. He sat silent and gloomy in a remote corner, mentally recalling all Edward's past misdeeds, and disparagingly criticizing his present demeanour.

His old offences of being taller, stronger, in better circumstances, and in a profession that he had himself most regretfully renounced from a sense of duty, revived, though perhaps Paul was not aware of it. All he consciously thought was that Edward was not the good fellow he had been; his manner was not quite up to the mark; there was a certain coxcombry about him that he really was sorry to observe, and so on.

During these gloomy reflections, his cousin observed to him in passing his chair, just as someone was about to play on the piano, "How well Miss Rickman sings!"

"How on earth do *you* know how she sings?" growled Paul.

"I spent the afternoon at Arden," was the disquieting reply, which set Paul pondering as to how he got there, and, above all, why he went.

Then he heard his mother request his cousin to do some little service that should have fallen to himself, and again began mentally depreciating him, until he looked up by chance and caught the reflection of his haggard, scowling face in a mirror, and started with a shamed sense of his own paltriness which made him gloomier than ever.

"I cannot imagine what I should have done without you to-night, Edward," Mrs. Annesley said when the people were gone, "Paul was utterly fagged and stupid. Another time it would be better for you to leave the room altogether, Paul."

"Fine young man, that cousin of yours," said an elderly gentleman whom Paul was helping into his coat in the hall; "glad to

see him, whenever he likes to look in." Was it possible that these trumpery things could add to the acerbity of Paul's feelings? He would have scouted the idea.

Overcome with sleep as he was, he would not go to bed until he had had a few words with his cousin, whom he took to his room to smoke.

"I think," he began, after a few fierce puffs at his pipe, "that you might have waited for me before calling on the Rickmans. As I told you, I had arranged my work on purpose to have a spare morning to-morrow, and meant to drive you over to luncheon."

He was only half mollified when Edward recounted his misadventures with the chestnut, and his accidental meeting with the Rickmans at their door.

"You military fellows never suffer from want of assurance," he grumbled; "you seem to have made yourself pretty well at home at the Manor."

"It was not due to personal merit; I was received as your cousin," he replied. "I say,

Paul, I congratulate you on your choice. I am glad you forewarned me; such a charming girl, and so clever as well as pretty!"

Paul's eyes flashed; he could scarcely bear even to hear her admired by another, and the word "pretty" seemed so inadequate to express the lofty charm that made a sort of paradise about Alice.

"And do you suppose," he replied in his haughtiest manner, "that my choice would be less than the very highest? No mere prettiness would attract me. I may never win her, I may never even have the right to speak to her. But I shall never decline upon a meaner choice."

"Oh! you will win her, never fear," replied Edward, on whom this arrogant tone jarred. "But why not drive over all the same tomorrow? It would only be civil to thank Mr. Rickman for stabling the unlucky chestnut."

"It would be more military than civil," returned Paul with asperity. "If you begin an acquaintance by coming two days follow-

ing to lunch, how on earth you are to carry it on, Heaven only knows!"

It must have been the iced pudding, Edward thought; something has disagreed with him.

"You did not tell me," he added aloud, after long and silent reflection on the face he had seen in the sunny oriel among the flowers that morning, "how Miss Lingard came to form one of the Arden family. Has she been with them long?"

"When Sibyl was about thirteen they advertised for a girl of the same age to educate with her. Then Miss Lingard's guardians placed her there. She has no ties of her own, and having become attached to them, and they to her, she now considers Arden her settled home."

"They all appear fond of her, even Gervase," returned Edward. "She treats him quite as a brother——"

"Did that strike you?" interrupted Paul.

"Oh! yes, she scolded him just as my sisters do me. And she picked up his hat and

dusted it in the most matter-of-fact way, and he took it without a word of thanks. How pluckily he stood up to the kicking horse! I like Rickman. I like them all," he added, warmly. "Such genial people, so clever, and yet so homely in their ways. I like homely ways. I like the dear old house. It seemed all sunshine and music and flowers."

Paul's dark face flushed, and his eyes flashed so that the whites were visible.

"Now I know," he thought, "where he got those confounded violets."

For, going to seek his cousin in his room just before dinner, the scent of flowers attracted him, and he saw a bunch of double grey violets in water on a table. He knew his habits well, and buying flowers was not among them; so he laughed and came to his own conclusions. "Some girl gave him those violets, I'll wager; and the fellow will be sentimental for about half an hour over them."

But, now he knew that Edward had been to Arden, where in a warm nook beneath the

south oriel those double violets grew, a spasm clutched at his heart.

"And so they gave you violets?" he said, tranquilly.

"Violets? What violets?" asked the other, with an unsuccessful effort to appear indifferent.

"Those in your room. They scent the house. Love and a fire cannot be hid, neither can violets."

"They were given me by the ladies of Arden," Edward explained, with an embarrassed and almost apologetic air.

"Really?" replied Paul, in dulcet tones. Then he rose and walked to the closet which contained the skeleton, and opening the door, shook his fist at the grinning skull within, uttering in a low tone the sole word "Damnation!" Then he returned to the fireside much refreshed, and quite unnoticed by his cousin, whose slight natural powers of observation were now totally obscured by the circumstance of his having fallen head-over-ears in love.

The cousins did not go to Arden next day, but on the following day the Rickmans dined with the Annesleys, and all, excepting Gervase, arrived early in the afternoon, making the house, according to their custom, their headquarters while carrying on an extensive shopping campaign.

Perhaps it was odd that Edward Annesley, who was ostensibly playing billiards at the club opposite the Berlin-wool shop, should, after long reconnoitring at the window, bethink him that Mrs. Annesley had lamented having come to the end of her knitting-cotton, and straightway sally forth and enter the fancy-work shop, where he appeared as much surprised to find the Arden ladies as they were to see him.

"I want—ah!—some cotton—to knit with," he explained in answer to the shop-woman, when Sibyl told him that she had thought knitting as a means to kill time was confined to the lower ranks of the army, and was not affected by officers.

"Officers," he replied with solemnity,

are always delighted to be useful—when they can."

"A capital proviso," replied Sibyl. "I should have thought being ornamental exhausted their energies."

"Do not heed that mad girl," said Alice, smiling indulgently; "she is out for a holiday."

But he heard a great many more teasing remarks that afternoon from Sibyl, whose grace and dainty manner carried her safely through much that in others might have seemed pert, and the end of it was that Paul, who came in to tea on purpose to meet the Arden ladies, was scandalized to see the two younger walking leisurely up the street, accompanied by his cousin, laden with books from the library.

Mrs. Annesley laughed when she heard of her nephew's civility in buying cotton for her; but Paul looked very grim, and watched him closely all the evening.

Edward sang to Sibyl's accompaniment, and turned her leaves for her when she sang,

and then he sat by her side and talked; while Alice played to Gervase's violin, and the elders, including the watchful Paul, played whist.

No word or movement on Alice's part escaped Edward's notice; but something, which was partly the chivalry of deep feeling, and partly the perverse fate which besets lovers, made him careful to conceal his interest in her, and appear more occupied with Sibyl whom he cordially liked. Thus Paul was put on a wrong scent, and was more genial to him that night than ever.

"Sibyl is undoubtedly the attraction," he thought.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

APPLE-BLOSSOMS.

A FEW weeks after Edward Annesley left Medington, which he did without again meeting the Manor family, Paul unexpectedly arrived at the garrison town in which his cousin was quartered, and spent some days with him, in a dejected frame of mind. Before returning to Medington, he reminded Edward of his promise given on his first evening at Medington, to the effect that he would not spoil his chance of success at Arden Manor, which the latter renewed, laughing at his cousin's seriousness. Paul then spoke of his wishes with regard to Alice Lingard, whose name he did not mention, and of the pecuniary difficulties which prevented him from asking her to marry him.

But he did not say that he was actually in debt, having lost heavily through running Diana in a steeplechase, nor did he say that he was in the habit of associating with men of ample means, notably the Highland officers to whom Captain McIlvray had introduced him, and sharing in amusements that he could not afford.

"Don't you think," Edward said, "that your mother would furnish funds for the marriage? She must know that marriage is an advantage to a doctor, and she is very fond of you."

"She is the best of mothers; but she would never see that we could not all live under one roof. And I would never subject any girl to *that*. The fact is," he broke out after a gloomy pause, "my life is wretched. But when I think of *her*"—here his face changed and his eyes kindled,—"it is all different: there is something to live for. It is maddening that I dare not speak yet. Heaven only knows when I shall be in a position to do so, and in the meantime there she is in her youth

and beauty exposed to the attentions of every chance comer. And it cannot go on for ever. I hate every man who goes to that house; I feel that unless I am quick, the fated man must come at last. I tell you, Ned, it is the torture of hell."

His cousin advised him to end his suspense at once. "You stand upon a fanciful punctilio, Paul," he said, "and for that you may spoil her life as well as your own. Speak to her and ask her to wait for you. You have a profession and a fair start in it, not to speak of the Gledesworth contingency, and hope will give you courage to win your way. If she loves you, she will be glad to wait; and if she does not, why the sooner you know it the sooner you will get over it and form other ties."

"Get over it!" cried Paul, looking up. "A man does not get over such a passion as this. Certainly not a man of my paste. Why only to see her is heaven, and to be without her, hell. The Mowbrays never do anything by halves."

"Then do not do this by halves," returned Edward cheerily. "Lay siege to her affections at once, and make up your mind to win her. And if you had not a penny in the world, is it a light thing to offer a heart like yours? I hear men talk of women, and I hear them speak of their sweethearts and wives, but I never hear men speak as you do. I believe, Paul, that a deep and serious passion is a very rare gift from Heaven. And I believe there is nothing like it in the whole world. Nothing so lifts a man from earth and reveals Heaven to him, nothing so makes him hate and despise his meaner self, nothing——"

"By Jove!" interrupted Paul, with a genial laugh, "the youngster has got the complaint himself!"

Edward replied that he might take a worse malady, and reiterated his advice with regard to decisive measures, and they parted, Edward marvelling at Paul's dejection and discontent.

He did not know how deeply Paul had yearned for a military life, and what it had

cost him to obey his mother's wishes in renouncing it, nor did he know why Paul had taken that little holiday and fled to Portsmouth. It was because the demon had once more entered into Mrs. Annesley.

"What a sweet woman dear Mrs. Annesley is!" the curate's wife was saying at the Dorcas meeting on the very afternoon of Paul's flight. "I wonder what keeps her away from us to-day?"

She little dreamt that it was the devil himself.

It was now mid-April, and at last there was respite from the bitter sting of the east wind; every day seemed more lovely than its fellow; in warm still nights, from the copses by the brook, the passionate music of nightingales arose, breaking the deep charmed silence and echoing through the dreams of sleepers in Arden Manor. No one there ever referred to their chance visitor of the early spring except Ellen Gale, who, when Alice paid her accustomed visits,

would sometimes allude to the voice they had heard singing past the window. "And you were right, miss; you said it was a gentleman's voice," she often repeated.

"Yes, Ellen, and the voice of a good man," Alice would reply. "There is so much in a voice."

"Yes, miss; yours quiets me down my worst days."

Alice and Sibyl were in the music-room on one of these golden afternoons, surrounded by books, easels, and other evidences of their daily employments. Sibyl's cat was coiled on the wide, cushioned window-seat beneath the open lattice, through which a flood of sunshine poured; the deer-hound lay stretched on a bearskin beneath it, sleeping with one eye, and with the other lazily watching his mistress, who sat listlessly at the piano, improvising in minor keys.

The melancholy of spring was upon Alice, that strange compound of unspeakable feelings: the strenuous life of the natural world, its beauty and its melody, stirred depths in

her heart that she was too young to understand; when some bird-note came with unexpected passion upon the silence, she felt as if her heart were being torn asunder and the old orphaned feeling of her childhood rushed back upon her. The simple interests of her quiet life now failed her, former occupations grew stale, there was a hardness and want of she knew not what in the brilliant sunshine and cloudless sky. She wondered if after all it were true that life, to all but the very young, is a grey and joyless thing. Hitherto the future had seemed so full of dim splendour, so pregnant with bright possibility, all of which had unaccountably faded.

As she sat at the instrument playing dreamy music, she mused upon that day of transient spring, set like a pearl in a long row of chill sullen days, when she sat busied with her flowers in the oriel and the door opened and Edward Annesley appeared. What a bright world it was into which he stepped! How long it seemed since then! He had vanished

out of their life as quickly as he had entered it; no one ever mentioned him now. Perhaps he would never come again.

The thought struck chill to Alice's heart, the colour faded from her face, while the music died away beneath her nerveless fingers.

After a brief pause she began to play again, and sang with Sibyl the following duet:

"The Coming."

"The daisies fell a tremble,
Their tips with crimson glowed,
When they hastened to assemble
In troops to line his road;

"The daisies fall a tremble
And bow beneath his feet,
As they would fain dissemble
Their joy his eyes to meet;

"The roses hang to listen
From the briar across the way,
Where the morning dews still glisten,
For the first words he shall say;

"And the little breezes, bringing
Song and scent and feathered seed,
Are glad to waft his singing
Across the sunny mead.

"He cannot heed the daisies,
The roses or the breeze;
He is here—among the mazes
Of the orchard's friendly trees."

They sang the first four verses to an even-flowing melody in a major key, but the last to a more powerful measure, accompanied by minor chords which resolved themselves into exultant major harmonies to burden the phrase "he is here," which was taken up alternately by the two voices and repeated by them in different musical intervals in the manner of a fugue, so that the words "he is here" flew hither and thither, and chased each other above the harmony in a rapture that seemed as if it would never end, until the last lines rounded off the song in a joyous melody with major harmonies.

Scarcely had they made a silence, through which the song of a blackbird pulsed delici-

ously from the orchard hard by, when they were startled by the sound of a man's voice crying, "Thank you," from beneath the window.

Hubert started up with pricked ears, and the two girls went to the open lattice and looked out. Just beneath the window on the broad turf walk was a garden-seat lightly shaded by a tall apple-tree, leafless to-day, but ethereally beautiful with crimson buds and delicate open blossoms of shell-like grace, which outlined the boughs in purest red and white on the pale blue sky. Sitting there was Mrs. Rickman, and standing by her side, looking upwards with a spray of the blossoms just touching his crisp-curled hair, was Edward Annesley.

Alice flushed brightly; Sibyl turned pale.

Hubert stood beside his mistress, almost as tall as she, with his paws on the window-sill, and wagged his tail with a whine of joyous recognition; then, in his language, he courteously requested the ladies to descend and welcome the new-comer.

"We were half afraid to speak," the latter said from below. "Do, please, go on singing."

But the singers were effectually silenced, and presently came into the garden, and chairs were fetched and a circle formed beneath the glancing shadows of the apple-tree.

"Mr. Annesley has walked seven miles to see us," Mrs. Rickman said; "we must make him welcome."

"You are welcome, Mr. Annesley," Alice replied, with her exquisite smile and tranquil voice.

"Oh! yes; we are glad to see you," added Sibyl in her light treble; "it is not every day that people trouble themselves to walk seven miles to see us."

Then Edward said that he would not have accepted his invitation to stay with his friends, had they not lived within a walk of Arden, and as soon as he had said it, he knew that he had gone too far, and every one except Mrs. Rickman, who had a happy knack of seeing nothing that was not delightful, saw it too.

"Then," asked this innocent lady, "why not spend a few days with us?" This was exactly what he longed to do, but he was too confounded by his bare-faced hint to reply at first. "What a clown she must think me!" was his inward reflection.

Then Mr. Rickman came out with the half-waked air with which he usually regarded the outer world, and having with difficulty detached his mind to some extent from the consideration of a human bone, that was probably pre-Adamite, and fixed it on his guest, added his hospitable entreaties to those of Mrs. Rickman. Finally it was decided that Annesley should take up his quarters there and then at the Manor, sending a messenger, with explanations, for his portmanteau.

Alice looked down on Hubert, whose graceful head lay on her knee, during this discussion; but Edward watched her face and thought he saw a pleased look steal over it when the decision was finally reached, and just then she looked up and met his earnest

gaze, and all the beauty of the spring rushed into these two young hearts.

In the meantime Paul Annesley, who had now recovered from the temporary despondency which drove him away from home, was enjoying that lovely April afternoon with the intensity that he was wont to throw into everything, and was at that very moment driving along the dusty high-road as fast as the Admiral could trot, in the direction of Arden. A set of archery materials had arrived at the Manor, and he had received instructions to come over as soon as he could find time, to help the ladies learn shooting; not that he waited for invitations to that house, but a valid excuse for wasting an hour there was extremely pleasant. He drove into the stable yard on reaching the Manor, and, hearing that the family were all in the garden, took his way thither without ceremony, and when he issued from the dark yew walk which opened into the lowest terrace saw a tableau which struck him dumb.

At the top of the long and broad turf

walk was a target; down against the house stood Alice in the act of drawing a bow; her hands were being placed in the right position by Edward, whom he had every reason to suppose miles away. Sibyl, leaning upon a bow at some distance, was looking on, and teasing Alice for her want of skill. Mr. and Mrs. Rickman were watching the scene from beneath the apple-tree, and Hubert, sitting very straight on his tail, was gazing intently before him, evidently turning over in his mind whether he ought to permit so great a liberty to be taken with his mistress. Alice drew her bow, the arrow flew singing towards the target, the extreme edge of which it just grazed. Edward uttered a word of applause, which Sibyl joyously echoed; nobody heard Paul's quick footfall upon the turf walk, except Hubert, who rose and thrust his muzzle into his hand, so that he stood for some moments silently watching the progress of the shooting with a deadly conviction that he was not wanted there. Perhaps Edward looked a little guilty when

he saw his cousin, and took some quite needless trouble to explain how he came to be there, but perhaps it was only Paul's fancy.

"You have been before me, Ned," he said, after he had been duly welcomed, and in reply to these laboured explanations; "I came to start the shooting. You appear to be a past master in the craft."

"Oh! yes. We have a good deal of archery. I believe you are a good shot. Now we can have a regular match."

But Paul's pleasure in the pastime was gone, he scarcely knew why. He had a great mind to go away and say he was engaged, but on reflecting that this vengeance would fall only on himself, thought better of it and remained, apparently in the happiest mood.

CHAPTER II.

ARCHERY.

"And what do 'em call this yere sport?" asked Raysh Squire, who was helping the gardener in an extra spell of work at a little distance from the archers, and, having now finished setting in a row of young plants along a taut string, was pausing to contemplate his work with an admiring eye. "Zimple it looks; mis'able zimple."

"Archardry, they calls it," replied Jabez, finishing his own line of plants, and unbending his body slowly till he reached his normal height; "calls it archardry, along o' doing it nigh a archard. Poor sport, I 'lows; give me skittles or quoits."

"'Tis poor sport, Jabez," returned Raysh, impressively, "vur the likes of we. But

I hreckon it 's good enough vur gentry. Mis'able dull they be, poor things, to be zure. My wuld ooman, she zes to me, 'Lard, how I pities they poor gentlefolk, Raysh,' she zes; 'vorced to zet wi' clane hands from morning to night athout zo much as a bit of vittles to hready,' she zes. Terble hard putt to they be to beat out the time athout siling their hands. Archardry's good enough vur they, Jabez Young. But give me a gaäme of bowls and a mug of harvest ale." And Raysh majestically bent his long body till he reached his line of string, which he pulled up and posted further on, when he dibbled a second row of holes along its course, Jabez, a stout fellow in the prime of life, looking on admiringly till Raysh was half-way down his row, when it occurred to him to pull up his own line and post it afresh.

"I dunno," Jabez observed, when he had planted half this line, "but what I'd as zoon hae nothen to do mezelf."

"Ah, you dunno what's good vor 'ee," returned Raysh, with tolerant contempt; "you

ain't never ben tried that way, Jabez; your calling is entirely gineral. So zoon as you putts zummat into ground, zummat comes out on't, and you never zets down, zo to zay. Now buryen 's entirely different."

"You med zay zo, Raysh Squire," said Jabez; "what you putts into ground bides a powerful long time there, I 'lows."

"I 'lows it do, Jabez, when putt in in a eddicated way. I've a-knowed they as turns over coffins what ain't more than a score o' years old. Buryen of mankind, Jabez Young, is a responsive traäde; 'taint everybody, mind, what's equal to it. You med take your oath of that. You minds when the Queen zent vor me to Belminster about that there bigamy job, when Sally White vound out Jim had had two missuses aready? Passun and me sweared we married 'em regular. Pretty nigh drove me crazy, that did. There they kept me two martial days athout zo much as a bell to pull or a church to clane. Two martial days I bid about they there streets till I pretty nigh gaped my jaws out 'o jint. I'd

a give vive shiln if I could a brought my church and churchyard along wi' me, or had ar' a babby to christen, or so much as a hrow of taties to dig. 'Missus,' I sez to the ooman what kept the house we bid in, 'wullee let me chop a bit o' vire-ood vor ee? I be that dull,' I zes. 'Iss, that I ool!' she zes. 'And the moor you chops the better you'll plaze me,' she zes, and she laffed, I 'lows that ooman did laff. Zimmed as though I'd a lost mezelf. 'Where's Raysh Squire?' I zimmed to zay inzide o' mezelf all day long. But zo zoon as I heft that ar chopper, I zimmed to come right agen. 'I minds who I be now,' zes I. 'I be Raysh Squire, clerk and zexton o' Arden perish, aye, that I be,' and dedn't I chop that ar ooman's ood!"

"I never ben to Belminster; mis'able big plaäce, bent it?"

"Big enough, but ter'ble dull; nothen to zee but shops and churches over and over agen. Jim White, he took me along to zee the plaäce. We went and gaped at the cathedral; powerful big he was—I 'lows

you'd stare if you zeen he. Jim, he shown me a girt vield wi' trees in it outside of 'en, and girt houses pretty nigh so big as the Manor yender all hround. 'This here's the Close,' he zes. 'But where be the beästes?' zes I. 'Beästes?' a zes, 'Goo on wi' ye, ye girt zote," a zes; 'there baint no beästes in this yer Close. 'Tis passuns they keeps here, taint beästes!' Zure enough, there was passuns gwine in and out o' they housen, and a girt high wall all hround to pen 'em in. Ay, they keeps 'em there avore they makes em into bishops," he explained, with a magnificent air of wisdom, fully justified in this instance by his ecclesiastical profession, as Jabez reflected while slowly digesting this piece of information.

The old-fashioned garden lay on a slope, the vegetable portion being only separated from the flower-borders on either side the broad turf walks which intersected it, by espalier fruit-trees, now studded with the crimson silk balls of the apple, or veiled with the fragrant snow of the pear, so that the

archery party on the turf were well seen by the labourers on the soil, and *vice versâ*. Jabez went on planting another row in meditative silence, until an unusually wild shot from Sibyl sent an arrow over the flower-border through some lines of springing peas, into a potato-bed, when he stopped and called out in loud reproof.

"You med so well hae the pegs in if you be gwine on like that there," he growled, when he had found the arrow and brought it back; "the haulm's entirely broke, Miss Sibyl, that 'tes."

"Never mind, Jabez," she replied soothingly, "it is the first time;" and she added something about wire-netting.

"Vust time!" he grumbled, returning to his cabbages. "A onbelieven young vaggot! I never zee such a mayde vur mischief. Miss Alice, she never doos like that."

"Ay, Jabez Young, Miss Alice is a vine-growed mayde and well-mannered as ever I zee," returned Raysh, "but she's powerful high. She doos well enough Zundays and

high-days when there's sickness or death, but I 'lows she's most too high vur work-a-days. Give me tother one work-a-days."

"Ay, Raysh, you was always zet on she."

"I warnt I was. I warnt I be terble zet on that ar mayde, I be. I minds her no bigger than six penneth o' hapence, a jumping into a grave alongside o' dear wuld Raysh, a hiding from her governess; well I minds she. I couldn't never abide buoys, but that ar mayde, I was terble zet on she. I warnt I was. She caint do nothen athout Raysh, 'tes Raysh here and Raysh there. She's growed up mis'able pretty. All the young chaps is drawed after she, 'tother one's too high vor em. She aint vur work-a-days, Miss Alice aint. She thinks a powerful dale of me, too, do Miss Alice, she always hev a looked up to me, zame as Miss Sibyl there. Never plays nothen on the organ, athout I likes. It's 'How do that goo, Raysh?' or 'Baint that slow enough, Raysh?' Ay, they thinks a powerful lot of me, they maydes."

"Miss Alice is the prettier spoke," said Jabez. "Ah! there goos that young vaggot again! Hright athirt my beäns! Take em all hround, I 'lows you won't find two better-mannered young ladies than ourn in all the country zide."

"I warnt you wunt, Jabez Young, or two what shows more respect to they as knows better than theirselves. I never wouldn't hae no zaäce from em when they was little. A power o' thought I've a giv' to they maydes' manners, to be zure, a power of thought. Mr. Gervase, too, as onbelievin a buoy as ever I zee, and that voreright he couldn't hardly hold hisself together, and a well-spoken young vellow he's growed up. Our Mr. Horace wont be nothen to he. Passun he spared the hrod and I 'lows he've a spiled the child, as is hwrote in the Bible." And he bent over the fragrant earth again with a slow smile of complacency extending the wrinkles of his face laterally, unconsciously cheered as he worked by the merry call of a cuckoo, the melody of the song-birds, the

voices of the archers and the frequent and musical laugh of Sibyl.

"There never was such a mayde for laughen!" Raysh observed of his favourite, "that open-hearted!"

Alice laughed more rarely, though she, too, could laugh musically. It is odd that only women and children laugh gracefully; grown men, if they venture beyond a restrained chuckle, bluster out into an absurd crowing falsetto or a deep blatant haw-haw, infectious, mirth-provoking, but utterly undignified. Gervase Rickman knew this, and since the loss of his boy-voice had not laughed aloud, except at public meetings, when he produced an ironical laugh of practised excellence, which was calculated to discomfit the most brazen-nerved speaker. When he came home that evening and heard his sister's pretty laugh wafted across the sunny flowery garden, amid the music of the blackbirds and the cooing of the far-off doves, something in it—it may have been the certainty that it was too joyous to last, it may have been the tragic pro-

pinquity of deep joy to sorrow—touched his heart with vague pain. For Sibyl was the darling of his heart; he was proud of her beauty and talents, and cherished for her schemes and visions which he was too wise to give voice to.

He too was dismayed at the unexpected apparition of the younger Annesley, but he did not realize the full horror of the situation, since he naturally concluded that he had come in Paul's train, and would leave with him before long.

He declined to shoot, with the remark that lookers-on see most of the game, and sat beneath the apple-tree with his father, on whom the pleasantness of the scene and the unusual beauty of the day had prevailed over the charms of the pre-Adamite bone for an hour or two, and his mother, who had fallen completely into the womanly groove of enjoying life at second-hand.

Though they looked upon the same scene, the son and the parents saw each a different picture. It was a pleasant scene in its way.

The old-fashioned garden, with its bands of deep velvet turf, its fairy troops of tall narcissus drawn up in the borders, their slender green lances firmly poised, their shining flower-faces turned as if in sympathy with their youth and beauty to the young people near them; with the evening sunbeams touching the living snow of pear and cherry blossom on the net-work of fruit-trees with a glow as ethereal as that which departing day kindles on Alpine summits; and with the stern grey ridge of the downs outlined against the sky in the background. The square massive tower catching the warm sunlight on the right, and the dark firs, darker by contrast with the bright sky, on the left, made a pretty setting for the group of archers on the green beneath the crimson apple-bloom. Such was the actual picture, but Heaven only knows what Gervase saw besides.

Nor could any one guess what visions, hopes, ambitions and restless schemes passed through his busy brain as he strolled about with a tranquil, thoughtful air. Nor did

any one suspect the less vehement ambition, though not less vehement passion, concealed by the smile upon Paul's scarred face, and flashing fitfully in his dark-blue eyes, the occasional spasms of anguish that tore him and the struggle that raged within him, or the deep feeling that gave Edward's features a more spiritual beauty, or the vestal flame of unconscious passion that burnt on the altars of the two girls' hearts.

Alice had forgotten her recent melancholy, and when she remembered it later, thought it only natural that the arrival of an unexpected guest and the interest of the archery should disperse the temporary cloud and put her in unusual spirits, while Sibyl, who was more introspective and who sometimes rebelled against the monotony of their simple life, was conscious of a tranquil expectancy that cast a glamour over everything and gave the very apple-blossoms a new beauty.

The few words which passed between Edward and Paul Annesley that evening were

of such a nature that the former came to the conclusion that something must have disagreed with the doctor. But indigestion is not the direst scourge of humanity. Jealousy is far more painful.

Not that the unfortunate young man yielded to it. His better nature revolted against it. He reflected on Edward's promise and on his admiration of Sibyl, and succeeded for a time in stifling the flame of this uncomfortable passion, when a trivial incident made the smouldering fire blaze up with redoubled fury.

Alice, wearing some narcissus in her dress, was bending to pick up her glove, when she dropped a flower without perceiving it. Edward, who was just behind her, stooped as she passed on, and, with a rapid dexterity which must have baffled any but the Argus eyes of jealousy, caught up the flower and hid it in his coat, occupied apparently all the time in stringing a bow.

Only Paul saw the flower episode; he saw and felt and turned pale, a symptom of mental

perturbation which did not escape Gervase Rickman, who pondered upon it.

Gnawed as he was by these jealous feelings, Paul could not tear himself from the scene which constantly renewed his sufferings, but lingered till the twilight, when it was still so warm that Gervase's violin was brought out and part-songs were sung, till a nightingale began its golden gurgle hard by and charmed them all into silence.

Perhaps it was something in Sibyl's face, upturned with a rapt look towards the ruddy mass of apple-bloom, as she listened to the splendid song, which enlightened her brother, and so wrought upon him that he drew his bow fiercely across the strings of the violin, and, using a minor key, played with such pathos that it seemed as if he were touching the sensitive chords of his own heart and thus wrought upon those of his listeners. He knew now why Sibyl was so deeply interested in military things and had of late made such martial poems, why she had enquired specially into the functions of artillery and the degree

of peril to which artillery officers are exposed when in action, and he saw through the innocent artifice which assigned reasons for this sudden interest and made her avoid the most casual reference to one particular artillery soldier. Then he thought of Edward's evident admiration for Sibyl, and the attentions he had paid her, and resolved that Edward should marry her, a consummation that, as he thought, his strong will and subtle brain could certainly bring about. There was nothing on earth so dear to him as Sibyl's happiness, he imagined, scarcely even his own; and his melodies grew wilder and more heart-piercing, as he thought these things.

"I never remember such weather for April," Sibyl said later, feeling vaguely that a day so exceptional could not be repeated.

"There has been no such April since you were born," her father replied. "Too good to last."

Yet it lasted through the three idyllic days that Edward Annesley spent at Arden.

CHAPTER III.

SUNSET ON ARDEN DOWN.

Footsteps were so rare on the lonely road which led past the "Traveller's Rest," that it was scarcely possible for any to pass unheard by at least one of the inmates of that solitary dwelling.

Ellen Gale had listened for them as a break in life's monotony when in health and actively employed, and now, in the long, solitary silences of her fading life, they had become the leading events of day and night, and much practice had taught her to discriminate with such nicety that she could tell from their peculiar ring on the hard road whether they were those of youth or age, man or woman, gentle or simple. Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon there would be a double

footfall, light, yet lingering, and she knew that sweethearts were passing, and wondered what the end of their wooing might be. And then at times some memory stabbed her to the heart, and she turned her face to the wall.

> "Quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
> Menò costoro——"

cried Dante, his pity mingled with something akin to envy, when he met the lovers of Rimini, united for ever in the terrible tempestuous hell, whither so many sweet thoughts had brought them.

Sitting at the window one bright April evening, Ellen heard the heavy, dragging steps of a labouring man whose youth was worn out of him, and she knew by their ring that they were those of Daniel Pink, the shepherd.

"You goo on, Eln," cried her father, sceptically, when she told him who was coming, "you caint tell by the sound."

"I warnt she can," corrected Mam Gale, Jacob's mother, who was moving about before

the hearth-fire, busy with ironing, "terble keen of hearing she be, to be zure."

Ellen smiled with innocent triumph when she perceived the weather-beaten form of the shepherd turn in at the wicket, and clank with a heavy angular gait over the large flints with which the court was pitched, followed by his shaggy dog.

"Ay, here ee be, zurely, Jacob," said Mam Gale, looking up from her ironing with a slow smile. "Come on in, Dan'l," she added, raising her voice to a shrill pitch. "How be ye?"

"Evening," said the shepherd, stumbling heavily over the flagged floor of the kitchen, and dropping himself on to a settle by the fire, while Jacob Gale, briefly acknowledging his entrance by a sullen nod, and a "Warm 'sev'nen," kept his seat on the opposite side of the fire, and smoked on.

"How d'ye zim, Eln?" asked the shepherd, after some minutes' silence, during which the click of Mam Gale's iron and the song of the kettle on the fire were heard.

Ellen replied cheerfully that she was better, and hoped to get out in a day or two; and she looked yearningly out of the window, where she could see the blue sky and some martins, who were busy building a nest in the thatched eave above with much happy twittering and fuss.

"They be allays like that in a decline, when they be took for death," said Mam Gale, lugubriously, "poor things, towards the end they perks up. The many I've zeen goo, shepherd."

"When be ye gwine to 'Straylia, Reub?" asked the shepherd.

"Not avore Ellen's took," he replied.

"And he baint agwine then, Dan'l," added Mam Gale, suspending her ironing. "What call have he to goo vlying in the vaäce o' Providence, when's time's come vor'n to goo? Downright wicked I calls it."

"Zims as though you med zo well hae a chance to live, Reub," suggested the shepherd, taking the tankard Reuben had brought him, and applying his bearded face to it; after

which he paused, smacking his lips and pondering deeply upon the flavour of the draught.

"I med so well live," repeated Reuben wistfully.

"Everythink's upside down out there," said Mam Gale, contemptuously; "the minister he zes to me, ee zes, volks walks along head downwards over there, ee zes."

"And that's what Willum Black zes, zure enough," echoed Jacob, solemnly, "'s brother went out 'Straylia; ee zes as how the zun hrises evenings when volks wants to go to bed, and goes down agen mornings when 'tis time to get up, out there."

"Zo they zes," added Mam Gale, dubiously. "Volk zays there's winter hright in the middle o' summer there."

"How do the carn grow if they gets winter weather in zummer-time?" asked the shepherd, after profound meditation.

Reuben supposed that it grew in the winter, and silent meditation followed, broken only by Mam Gale's reiterated assertions to the accompaniment of the clicking iron that "volk

med zo well be buried comfortable in Arden church lytten, as goo about head downwards out there."

"A-ah!" growled Jacob, before leaving the room to receive an approaching customer, "I don't hold wi' these yer new-fangled notions. Volk used to die natural deaths right zide uppermost in my young days."

Then the shepherd, seizing an opportunity for which he had long been waiting, and diving deep into the recesses of his garments for something which he extracted with difficulty, produced two large ripe oranges.

"My missus zeen em in Medington, and she minded ye," he said apologetically, looking with a beaming face at the oranges, which from long propinquity to it were almost as warm as the good fellow's heart; "'taint only dreppence, she zaid, and Ellen Gale med so well hae em when she can get em."

"It was very kind," replied Ellen; and the shepherd sank into a pleased silence, and gazed steadily at the pretty fading girl, and

at the oranges on the window-sill before her beside the bunch of wall-flowers and polyanthus he had silently placed there on his entrance.

"Mis'ble zet on vlowers, my missus is," he continued. "'Let the vlowers bide longside of the taäties,' she zes, 'vlowers don't ate nothing.' Taäties is vlower enough vur me."

"Flowers don't do here," Ellen said, "it is too keen. The doctor says it's too keen for me, but healthy for sound chestes."

"Some thinks Dr. Annesley aint wold enough for his work," the shepherd said; "Davis is the man for they."

"If he aint wold enough aready, he never will be, Dan'l Pink," retorted Mam Gale with decision. "He've a helped dree on us off. I don't hold with new-vangled things. Give me a dactor what hev zeen all our volks off comfortable."

"Davis hev buried a tidy lot," urged the shepherd. "Come to that, he and his vather avore un have helped so many under ground as Annesley and his vather put together."

"You med talk, Dan'l Pink," retorted Mam Gale, tossing her ironed linen aside with scorn, "but you wunt vind a cleverer dacter than ourn in a week o' Zundays. 'S vather, wold Annesley, was cleverer drunk than any of t'others sober."

"You may say that, mother," added Jacob, returning; "you minds when he come in one wet day and drinked a pint of best spirits straight off. Zes to me, when he went away, he zes, 'Don't you never marry a 'ooman with a tongue, Jacob Gale, or you med want to wet yourn with summat stronger than water.' Didn't zim no drunker than Dan'l there, that a didn't."

"I never yeard the wold chap drinked avore," said Daniel meditatively.

"It wasn't knowed not to zay in a general way," added Jacob, "'wold chap knowed how to carr 's liquor and a didn't drink reg'lar. Married the wrong ooman, that's where 'twas."

"She was a vast too good vor 'n," added Mam Gale; "her family was high and her

ways was high, and he knowed he wasn't the biggest man in 's own house. That's the way with men. They cain't abide to be zecond best indoors, whatever they med be outdoors."

"Zure enough, a ooman didn't ought to be better than a man, 't aint natural like," commented Jacob. "It's agen the Bible; vur why? Eve yet the apple, and Adam he thought he med so well jine in."

"Let he alone vur that when ee zeen 'twas hripe un," commented Mam Gale with severity.

The shepherd was so struck by Jacob's observation, that he remained silently gazing at the window, through which the glories of an April sunset could be seen diffused over the wide reach of sky, for full five minutes, while his rough-coated dog, who had followed him in and lain tranquilly dozing at his feet, roused by a thoughtful look on his master's face, sat up and watched him, hoping for a signal to move.

While the shepherd gazed thus, he observed a change in Ellen's face, which was thus before

him—a change like that in the sky when the red flush of sunset spread across it a moment before, a brightening of hue and a sublimation of expression which filled him with awe. "She's a thinking of kingdom come, where she's bound before long," he reflected.

But it was a more tangible gladness, though it partook of the deepest charm of that undiscovered land, the joy in what is higher and dearer than self, which thus transfigured Ellen's pretty hectic face; it was the sight of two figures whose outlines were traced upon the pink-flushed sky, two young figures followed by a hound; they talked as they went, their faces lighted with the changing rose-tints of the tranquil evening.

"Miss Lingard! so late!" exclaimed Ellen.

"And young Mr. Annesley 'long with her," commented Reuben, rising and looking out.

"I hreckon she've vound somebody to keep company with at last," added Mam Gale, comprehending the situation at a glance. "Personable she be and pleasant spoke as ever I known. But t'other one hevs all the

sweethearts. Menvolk never knows what's what."

Little did Alice imagine the construction that would be put upon this innocent evening stroll. Reuben's disinclination, or rather that of his friends, to the emigration scheme Paul and Alice had arranged together, had been discussed in family conclave that day, and Edward had again brought forward his suggestion that Reuben, if still sound, should enlist in an India-bound regiment and thus get the benefit of a few warm winters. Alice had just started to broach the subject that evening, when Sibyl suddenly suggested that Edward had better follow her, and thus explain clearly what he intended.

"A capital idea," added innocent Mrs. Rickman. "You will soon overtake her if you make haste."

He did not wait for a second bidding, and Alice had not crossed the first field before Edward was by her side.

He was to leave Arden next morning, and

the consciousness of this brought something into his manner that he would not otherwise have suffered. He spoke of his prospects, the earliest date at which he hoped to be promoted, and the chances of remunerative employment open to him, and Alice listened with a courteous attention, beneath which he hoped rather than saw something warmer. He referred to the Swiss tour projected by the Rickmans for the autumn, and to his own intention, favoured by Mrs. Rickman, of making the same tour at the same time, and they both agreed that, to make the excursion perfect, Paul, whose mother was to be of the party, should manage to be with them.

Nothing more of a personal nature was said, but they each felt that this evening walk made a change in their lives, putting a barrier between all the days which went before and all that were to follow after. They strolled slowly along in the delicious air, pausing to see the purple hills dark against the translucent western sky, the colouring of which spread upwards, first gold, then primrose and pale

green edged with violet, to clearest blue, just flecked by little floating clouds like cars of gold and pearl; pausing to look eastward across the plain to the line of grey-blue sea, and to listen to some deeper burst of melody from the woods and sky; pausing, above all, at the chalk quarry, a mysterious, melancholy place, haunted by legends and traditions. Standing, as they did, on the high-road leading past the wide entrance to it, they saw a broad level of white chalk, broken here and there by a milky pool, a small tiled hut and dark shadow-like spots upon which a slow accretion of mould had encouraged a faint green growth, half moss, half grass, and surrounded by an almost semicircular wall of grey chalk cliff with a narrow dark outline of turf, drawn with sharp accuracy between it and the sky. This cold pale cliff was shaded and veined here and there, where no quarrying had been recently done, by such beginnings of vegetation as clouded the ground, and was broken further by one or two black spots, which

were caves. Some ravens flew croaking from their holes in the cliff-face with a grim effect, which the swallows darting about in the sunshine and the larks singing above could not wholly neutralize.

Perhaps it was the sense of contrast between themselves and this desolate scene that made them linger in fascinated silence before it, and while they lingered, the light changed, the sinking sunbeams filled the sky with molten gold, and the rampart of cliff turned from ghastly grey to warm yellow; then it glowed deep orange, and at last it blushed purest rose.

"I shall never forget this," Edward said, when they turned and he saw the face of Alice suffused with rose-light against the rose-red cliffs.

A few more steps took them to the inn on the crest of the hill. The shepherd rose and left at their approach, and the new-comers entered the kitchen, which seemed dark after the brightness outside. Mam Gale's wrinkled bronzed face, surrounded by a white-frilled

cap tied under her chin, beamed with welcome; her purple-veined, labour-darkened hands and arms, which were always visible below the small plaid shawl pinned tightly over her bowed shoulders, ceased to ply the iron, and she came forward to hand chairs to the visitors. The dull glow from the hearth emphasized rather than dispersed the gloom of the low smoke-browned kitchen, so that it was scarcely possible to see even the shining crockery on the black oak dresser, the two great china dogs and brass candlesticks on the high chimney-piece and the gaily-coloured prints on the walls, and the eye turned with relief to the small window, where the fading light came through the tiny leaded panes and centred itself on the face of Ellen, turned towards the sky as if awaiting benediction, while the men's faces were in shadow. Alice went to the window and kissed Ellen's too brightly tinted face, her own looking more healthy by contrast, and the sight of the two young women, illumined by the last fading rays of light, touched

Edward and made a picture that long afterwards he liked to dwell upon. He remained silent, while Alice took the chair offered her and plunged at once into the subject of Reuben's enlistment, a proposal received at first with stupefied dismay.

Mam Gale dropped thunderstruck upon a chair, regardless of the pile of freshly ironed caps she crushed beneath her. "Our Hreub goo vur a soldier," she cried, when her indignation at last found voice; "Hreub what never drinked nor done aught agen the Commandments! Our Hreuben 'list! We've a zeen a vast of trouble, Miss Lingard, but we never known disgrace avore!"

It was no use for Edward to plead his own example; Mam Gale bid him remember what Reuben owed to his position in life. "'Taint no harm vur gentlevolk, they can do without characters and haint no call to be respectable," she said; "but our Hreub, what have always looked up to hisself, it do zim cruel to let he down."

Jacob was too horrified to utter a word of

remonstrance; but Ellen, whose imagination was fired by a vision of her brother in regimentals, went so far as to say that she had heard of respectable soldiers. Reuben eagerly corroborated her, and Jacob and his mother had so far recovered from the shock as to listen to Edward's proposals, when the sound of wheels was heard, a vehicle stopped at the wicket, and Paul Annesley's firm quick steps struck the courtyard flints and stone passage, and he came with cheery energy, unannounced as usual, into the firelit kitchen.

"Sorry I'm so late, Mam Gale, I was called out of my way. Ellen still up? That's right, my lass;" he had proceeded thus far, his hearty, mellow voice filling the kitchen with a breath of hope and health, when he became aware of the two figures seated near each other by the window, and he stopped, as if thunderstruck, a fiery spark flashing from his eyes.

"We had better go," Alice said, turning to Edward, as she rose after acknowledging

Paul's entrance. "Good-bye, Ellen, we must not take up the doctor's time."

There was something in this "we" that acted upon Paul like fire upon gunpowder, and he viciously ground his teeth.

He assured them that there was no need for them to go, but they went nevertheless, and he then stood before the window, talking to Ellen. He looked out into the violet dusk, watching intently while the two figures lessened and finally disappeared, and Ellen wondered at the strange look on his face, which she had only known hitherto full of kindness and good-humour, and at the pre-occupied manner that made him ask the same questions over again. His visit was as brief as he could make it. An irresistible power drew him; he sprang quickly to his seat and set the Admiral off at his best pace, but avoided the nearest way home, choosing that which led past Arden Cross.

The fleeting glory was gone from the chalk quarry, which showed desolate in its pale gloom, and seemed a fit abode for

spectres. A figure springing up behind a heap of stones by the road made the Admiral shy violently, and though it proved to be only that of a loitering child, Thomas, the groom, trembled all over and was bathed in a cold perspiration, for he knew that ghosts haunted the pit. As for his master, he punished the Admiral's mistake with such severity that the horse tore down the hill like a whirlwind, jerking the light dog-cart from side to side, and obliging the frightened Thomas to cling on with his hands, while the white-heat of passion kept his master firm, so firm that he was able to turn his head aside and gaze steadily across the dewy hedge-rows at the two figures walking through the fields to the Manor, until the bend of the road hid them from his sight.

CHAPTER IV.

MESSRS. WHEWELL AND RICKMAN.

The streets of Medington were all alive one sunny spring morning. Men were busy in the market-square placing hurdles for sheep and pigs; shopkeepers were turning their wares out of dark recesses, and arranging them on the pavements, to the great discomfort of passengers; carts — laden with wicker baskets, whence issued mournful cackles and quacks of remonstrance from victims unconscious of their doom, and all sorts of country produce, including stout market-women—rolled slowly into the town, drawn by thoughtful horses, who ventured upon no step without first duly pondering its advisability; small flocks of meekly protesting, yet docile, sheep, and disorderly herds of

loudly rebellious and recalcitrant pigs, were beginning to enter the streets from divergent country roads; housemaids, giving the bell-pulls an extra Saturday cleaning, loitered over their work, and looked up and down the street, to catch sight of country friends; clerks and shopmen wished the day over and Sunday morning come with its quiet; it was market day, the least Sabbatical and most bustling of the seven.

Daniel Pink was passing slowly along the High Street, his little frightened flock bleating and panting ahead of him, and seizing every opportunity for blundering into false positions to an extent that almost deprived Rough, the dog, of reason in the passionate indignation it aroused in his shaggy breast. Daniel laid his crook in this direction and that, and spread out his arms and grunted to his four-footed lieutenant, and was so engrossed in taking his charges safely past the vehicles and open doors, through which they were eager to dart, that until he was some distance past he forgot to look as usual at

Paul Annesley's door, to see if cherry-cheeked Martha, his daughter, was on the look-out. Then he threw the bunch of flowers he had carried in for her with such aim that she caught it just in time to prevent its striking the face of her master, who opened the door behind her, and to her dire confusion came out at that moment

"Wallflowers, Martha? Curious things to clean brass with, eh?" he said, with a good-tempered smile; and he stepped briskly down the street, his face darkening when he remembered the scene at the "Traveller's Rest" the night before.

The shepherd had been thinking of the same scene as he came along. He had related the conversation to his wife on his return to his lonely cottage, so that they had remained up beyond their usual hour talking over the dying fire; Mrs. Pink would for many days declare in the same words her conviction that it was better to die right side uppermost in England than to tempt Providence by journeying to a world in which every-

thing was upside down, and the very Commandments were probably by analogy reversed; while Daniel would as frequently observe that they raised a "terble lot of ship" out there, that he had once known a steady youth who enlisted when crossed in love, and that Ellen might possibly see the harvest carried home.

After the last saying he would generally be silent for some time, wondering to what unknown land Ellen would journey then. A great part of Daniel Pink's time was spent in wondering; the few events of his own and other lives, however deeply pondered upon, were soon exhausted, and then there were long lonely hours in sunshine and storm, on the wide windy downs, under the shelter of a bent thorn or a wind-bowed hedge, in the silent nights when great flocks of stars passed in orderly procession over the vast black chasms of space above him, or the hurtling storm swept round him—long empty hours that had to be filled with thoughts and imaginings of some voiceless kind. And

sometimes the musings of simple shepherds are grander, and their unspoken sense of the mystery and beauty which enfolds their obscure lives is deeper, than we imagine.

Gervase Rickman on his way to his office through the market, nodded condescendingly to the well-known weather-beaten figure standing among the pens. If he thought of him at all, it was as a slightly superior animal. Who expects to find a poet or a prophet beneath a smock frock or fustian jacket?

Gervase hurried along to his office, which stood just off the market-square, full of thoughts, for the most part common-place, even sordid, principally concerning the business affairs of half the county. He was later than he intended to be, and found the day's work in full swing when he stepped into the outer office, whose occupants suddenly became very diligent on his entrance. He took in every detail as he passed swiftly through, and sprang up the stairs to his own private room, followed by the white-headed clerk,

who had been the confidential servant, and, by virtue of his service, master, of the firm of Whewell and Rickman since before Gervase was born.

The room had a bow-window, giving upon a street which crossed the High Street at right angles, and commanding a view of both these streets and the broad market-place at their junction. This window differed from those usual to lawyers' offices because it was perfectly clean, and its transparent panes were obscured only to a moderate height by a wire blind, transparent to those within the room, though opaque from without. Rickman's desk was so placed, that while sitting at it he could, if so minded, observe all that was passing in the focus of town life beneath this window. Not that he enjoyed such leisure as to need window-gazing to fill it up, for more business was done in that bow-windowed room than in any other in the town.

He was vexed at being a little late on this bustling market-day, and still more vexed at the cause of his delay, which was a woman.

He hastened to look at the letters before him, while his roving glance swept the street as he listened to the old clerk's communications.

"Dr. Annesley called and was much put out," the latter said; "he could not wait, as he was starting on his country rounds. He wrote this note." The note was brief.

"I must have that money, no matter at what interest," it ran. "Could I raise some upon the Gledesworth prospects? Call before you leave town to-day.—P. A."

"My good fellow, why will you mix with rich and idle men?" Rickman thought to himself.

"That will do, Hughes," he said, and the old clerk left him to his work, and there was silence in the room, broken only by the rapid course of the lawyer's pen.

His face was heavy with care, and he was not quite so sure as he had been of the potency of human will, and especially of his own. The check Alice Lingard had given him two days before on Arden Down, when he had formally asked her to marry him,

hurried on to decisive measures by the necessity of putting a stop to Edward Annesley's apparent designs, was severe and far less easy to bear than he had anticipated—for he was too good an observer not to have known that Alice would never accept his first offer; he relied upon time and circumstance, the power of his will and the continued stress of his passion, which was patient as well as ardent, to win her.

"My mother," he reflected, while another portion of his active brain was occupied with the subject beneath his pen, "is the most amiable of human beings, but she is the most simple and unobservant. My father has talents, but with regard to all that concerns human life and conduct he is an infant in arms. How on earth Sibyl and I came by our brains, Heaven alone knows; on the whole we should be thankful that we have any. If that stupid little Sib would but take a fancy to Paul she might catch him at the rebound. And Paul has expectations. Paul saw them together last night and enjoyed it as much as I did.

But women are so unreliable, they upset all one's calculations, one never knows what they will do next. As for that good-looking fool——" Gervase sighed and paused in his work; he did not like to admit to himself that he had made too light of him, yet he feared it, and when he thought of Sibyl's secret he burned with hatred for the man who had so deeply touched her heart. He looked out upon the thickening stream of passengers in the street and saw one of whom he made a mental note, and went on writing with the under-current thought that nothing was any good without Alice, and that the very strength of his desire for her love was sufficient warrant for his winning it. "And what a man she might make of me!" he thought, perhaps with some dim deeply hidden notion of propitiating Providence with the promise of being good if he could but get his coveted toy.

While his pen flew over the paper he recalled the beginning of this attachment, now fast developing into a passion.

It was Alice's seventeenth birthday, and he

was talking to his father about her affairs, when the latter remarked that she had now grown a tall young woman.

"And we shall lose her, Gervase," he added. "She will marry early. Besides her good looks, she has what men value more, money."

Then Gervase thought how convenient her little fortune would be to a man in his position, and reflected further that, ambitious as he was, he could not reasonably expect to find a better match. While thus musing, he strolled out into the garden and saw Alice, yesterday one of the "children," an overgrown girl, an encumbrance or a toy, according to the humour of the moment, gathering flowers, unconscious of his observation. It was a different Alice that he saw that day; the child was gone, giving place to a young creature who compelled his homage. He offered her his birthday congratulations with deference, his manner had a new reserve. "She shall be my wife," he said to himself with a beating heart.

Three years had passed but this purpose had not faltered. Then came the check on Arden Down. This occurred at a gipsying excursion by the Manor party, during which he found himself alone with her. He knew that it was too early to press his suit, but Edward Annesley's visit forced his hand.

Alice hoped that it was but a passing fancy and tried to impress this view of the affair upon him. "You are making a mistake," she said; "you would not be happy with me. I have not even ambition. Let us forget this, dear Gervase. Otherwise I must leave you. I hope you will not drive me away from Arden. It is my only home."

They were standing by a gate on the down, looking over the plain, which stretched away with its budding trees half veiled in leafage to the blue belt of sea: cowslips nodded in the hedge near them; the great spring chorus of birds was borne faintly from the valleys up to their airy height; the world was full of music and beauty. Gervase looked straight into Alice's eyes and

fascinated her by the magnetism of his glance, and he spoke as if moved by a power beyond his control.

"It is no mistake," he said. "You are the one woman for me. And I will win you," he added in deep, almost menacing tones. "It may be years first. But I *will* win you, I *shall* win you. Yes; in spite of yourself."

Alice trembled; she could not withdraw her fascinated gaze from his. The air of conviction with which he spoke seemed prophetic; her heart beat painfully; she was on the verge of tears.

But she was no weakling; she summoned all her forces to meet and defy him. "How dare you speak like that!" she said, in cold, cutting tones.

"I dare," he replied, with inward trembling but outward determination, "because I love. Forgive me Alice," he added more gently, when she turned away with a look of scorn, "I was carried away. Forget my words. Forget my folly. Let us be as we were before."

Then tears came to her relief. She quickly checked them, smiled once more, and there was peace between them. After that he was careful to suppress all traces of the lover in his manner, and she was gradually reassured. He was also careful to draw her observation to the attentions which Edward Annesley appeared to pay to Sibyl, and to confide to her his approval of the match.

That Edward was winning Alice's heart was bitter to Gervase; that he was winning Sibyl's, and threatening to spoil her life, was almost more bitter. He resolved that Sibyl's life should not be spoilt; he determined to bring Annesley to book, and show him that he was bound in honour to marry her. But this step needed the most subtle treatment; the slightest mistake would be fatal. Besides, he feared to precipitate whatever designs Annesley might have with regard to Alice, by premature interference, and contented himself with being at Arden as much as possible during Edward's visit, and making arrangements to keep him apart from Alice during

his absence, in which small schemes he was greatly aided by the transparent simplicity of his mother.

Truly this unfortunate young man had more than enough to burden his active brain, and just when it was important, in view of the approaching county election, to give his mind entirely to political affairs. Women seemed to be made expressly to torment and perplex mankind, as Raysh Squire observed of boys. If Sibyl, whom he loved with an instinctive clinging affection, almost as deep as his self-love, had been but a man. "But then," he reflected, "perhaps we should have wanted the same woman. That fatal sex would still have ruined all."

He had hitherto said that he would not live without Alice; now he found that he could not. Wealth, success, power and position, things that he had yearned for and purposed to win by the strength of his intellect and energy, suddenly lost all value in themselves; without Alice they were no good.

"I must and I will have her," he muttered, dashing his pen fiercely into the ink-bottle, at the conclusion of his task.

His reflections were disturbed by the opening of the door; the not very usual sound of a lady's dress rustling over the matting was heard, and Mrs. Annesley met Gervase's fierce intense gaze with one of her seraphic smiles.

In an instant the young lawyer's glance fell, and changed to its everyday suavity as he rose with a smile, in which surprise and welcome were equally blended, to receive his unexpected visitor.

"You are doubtless surprised, Mr. Rickman," she said, taking the chair he placed for her, "that I should visit you instead of sending for you as usual. I have a reason."

"That is of course," replied Gervase. "You know I am always at your service at any moment."

"I thought your country clients would scarcely have arrived at this early hour, and I might therefore seize the opportunity of calling on you on my way home from morn-

ing prayers without attracting attention at home. My beloved son is, I fear, in sad difficulties."

"Indeed," returned Gervase, with a look of surprised interest, while he moved a paper softly over Paul's note. "I am sorry for that."

"Is it possible," continued Mrs. Annesley, studying his face with an astonished air, "that my dear boy has not consulted even you upon the subject?"

"My dear Mrs. Annesley," returned Gervase, laughing, "do you suppose that we lawyers discuss our clients' affairs even to their nearest friends?"

"True," she replied, annoyed at herself. "I had forgotten Mr. Rickman for the moment, and was thinking of my young friend, Gervase. It is most probable that you know more of these unfortunate complications than I do, for my child, I cannot tell why," she added, applying her handkerchief to her eyes, "has not honoured me with his confidence. I feel this, Mr.

Rickman, as only a sensitive and devoted woman can."

"Doubtless," he said, with courteous patience. "Hang the woman! why in the world does she come here plaguing me with her feelings?" he thought.—"You have reason, then, to suppose that Paul is in difficulties of some kind upon which he has not consulted you?" he added.

"Dr. Annesley," she continued with severe dignity, "has incurred debts of honour, which he does not find himself in a position to discharge without serious inconvenience. I need scarcely tell you, Mr. Rickman, that my son's income is most insufficient for a young man of his birth and tastes. His professional success has not as yet been by any means proportioned to his talents and energy. His youth is against him. It naturally prejudices those who have every confidence in his skill. My son is proud; he prefers to make his own way, and no longer accepts an allowance from me, as you are aware. I honour his independence, but"—here she

dropped her dignity, and suddenly became natural in a burst of real feeling—"I do think he might come to me in his trouble."

"I daresay," Gervase said soothingly, while Mrs. Annesley daintily dried her tears, "that if he is, as you think, hard up, he sees his way out of the scrape, and does not wish to worry you if he can possibly help himself."

"That is just what hurts me, Gervase," replied Mrs. Annesley, still oblivious of her dignity. "He might know that I would grudge him nothing. It is hard that a man like Paul should never indulge in the tastes and amusements natural to his age. And I am ready, as he might know, to incur any sacrifice to extricate him. I would rather live in a hovel than see my son unable to meet debts of honour."

"We all know what a devoted mother he has," said the politic Gervase. "I infer, then, that you wish to find him the money."

"Exactly, dear Gervase; with accustomed penetration you go straight to the point."

"Well, then," said Gervase, glancing un-

observed at his watch, "why don't you mortgage some of your house-property? That would be better than selling stock just now. How much does he want?"

"That I believe you are in a better position to say than I am," she replied, with a dry little smile.

Gervase also smiled, and said that the mortgage should be effected at once, since he knew where to find the money, and in a surprisingly short time he contrived to get the whole of Mrs. Annesley's wishes expressed, and learnt that Paul was to be kept in doubt until the transaction was effected and the money in his mother's hands, when she intended to surprise him.

"Excellent young man," thought Mrs. Annesley, as she swept down the stairs and through the outer office, where the busy clerks inspired her with no more fellow-feeling than the sheep in the pens outside. "He has never given his mother a moment's anxiety. I suppose nothing would have induced him to run a horse unless he were

quite sure of being able to pay the consequences. Quiet and prudent, the son of a mere physician, how different from my brilliant Paul! The blood of the Mowbrays is not in *his* veins." She forgot that Paul was not even the son of a physician, since Walter Annesley had been but a country doctor, whose untimely death had not improved his son's prospects.

She walked joyously home through the ever-thickening stream of vans and carts, considering what expenses she could cut down to meet the interest of the mortgage, really glad that a load of care would be lifted from Paul's heart, but anxious that he should acknowledge and admire her sacrifice; few things pleased her so much as to be considered a martyr; she was a woman who could not exist without a grievance.

She wondered how Heaven came to afflict her with such a son, though she knew very well that she would not have loved him half so well had he been steadier and less extravagant. Destiny had evidently made a mis-

take in setting a man of his mould to wield the lancet; perhaps that view had also occurred to Destiny, and resulted in the recent removal of Reginald Annesley from the Gledesworth succession.

CHAPTER V.

STORM.

FULL of these thoughts, Mrs. Annesley entered her house and went through her usual tranquil occupations, all of which, however homely in themselves, were characterized by a certain elegance peculiar to herself.

The maids trembled when summoned one by one to her presence to be called to account for the various doings and misdoings of the week, and were equally awed by reproof or commendation, though, being human, they preferred the latter. Certain dainty dustings of bric-à-brac by her own hands occured on Saturdays, and the subsidiary dustings and cleanings of which they were the crown and summit, were truly awful in their immaculate perfection. She

arranged fresh flowers, and terrible was the fate of that maid who brought an imperfectly-cleaned vase for their reception, or spilled the water required for them. These weekly duties were all completed, and Mrs. Annesley, arrayed in fresh laces, was sitting in the drawing-room with some elegant trifle representing needle-work in her hand, when about one o'clock the Rickmans' phaeton drove up to the door with Edward Annesley, whom she expected to lunch with her on his way from Arden.

Paul had returned from his country round, and was watching the arrival of the phaeton from the window of his consulting-room with an eager intensity strangely disproportioned to the event. The grey mare trotted in her leisurely fashion up to the door, totally ignoring the unusual stimulus of the whip, which Sibyl applied smartly, in the vain hope of infusing some dash into her paces. Mrs. Rickman occupied the front seat by her daughter's side, and was protesting against her cruelty; but the grey mare might have

been a flying dragon, and these ladies harpies, for all Paul cared; his fiery glance was concentrated on the back seat, in which were Alice Lingard and his cousin. The latter was on the pavement before the vehicle had stopped. His farewells were soon said, and the phaeton drove off with the nearest approach to dash ever made by the grey mare in response to an unusually sharp cut of Sibyl's whip. Edward stood on the pavement looking for some moments after the vanishing carriage, with an expression that was not lost upon Paul. Then he slowly turned, crossed the pavement, turning once more in the direction of the carriage, now lost to view, and finally went up the steps and rang the bell. Paul felt that he was still looking in the direction taken by the phaeton though he could no longer see him.

He had seen what past between Edward and Alice at parting; only the lifting of Alice's gaze to Edward's when he wished her good-bye, but with a look so luminous that it went like a stab to Paul's heart. These things so

wrought upon him, that he seized a bust of Galen from a bracket by the wall and dashed it to pieces on the ground.

He had scarcely done this, when a patient was announced and condoled with him upon the accident. Paul smiled grimly in response, and proceeded to his business, a small, but delicate operation on the eye, which he effected with a steady skilful hand. No one in Medington knew what a skilful surgeon he was; even his mother did not credit him with professional excellence.

They were already at table when he went in to luncheon; Edward, quite unconscious of the storm he had set raging in his cousin's breast, seemed unusually friendly and pleased to see him.

"I was afraid I might miss you after all," he said, rising and grasping his hand in a grip so warm that he did not perceive the coldness with which it was received. "I know what a chance it is to catch you at luncheon, especially on a market-day."

"Not when I have guests," replied Paul,

with an extra stateliness, which Edward would have been incapable of perceiving even if his mind had been less pre-occupied; "only the most important cases keep me from home under such circumstances."

"He never suffers the professional man to obscure the gentleman," said Mrs. Annesley.

"He would not be your son if he did," Edward returned.

Mrs. Annesley was so light of heart in consequence of her morning exploit, that she chatted away most graciously and gaily, and set Edward on the congenial theme of his visit to Arden, and the virtues of the Rickman family. Paul observed with ever-deepening gloom that he did not mention Alice, he only named Sibyl when speaking of the ladies.

After luncheon there was still an hour to waste before Edward's train was due, and he was yet unconscious of anything unusual in Paul, when the latter asked him to go out in the garden with him. The garden was large; it extended not only by the full breadth of

the house to a wall bounded by the parallel street, but ran along that street for a little distance at the back of other houses. Beneath some tall limes, the crimson-edged branches of which were now showing a few fluttering transparent leaflets, pale green against the blue sky, there was a stretch of rich deep sward, the growth of at least a century. Here were benches, and sitting on one of them, one could see the flower-garden and the back of the house half hidden in ivy and creepers.

Quite silently the young men strolled through the whole length of the garden, Edward looking at the scented hyacinths, the flowering currants, old friends he knew so well, the great elm with the long disused swing and the delicate veil of April green about its lower branches, and vaguely enjoying the mystery and richness of the spring; Paul, with his eyes cast down, his lips closed firmly, his ears deaf to the song of the blackbirds who found homes in that pleasant garden, and whose music seemed like a romantic picture

painted on the prosaic background of the town noise.

Edward threw himself on a bench and stretched his legs comfortably before him in the sunshine, while he took his short pipe from his pocket and began to fill it, and was just beginning to wonder why Paul did not smoke. Then he looked up and was surprised at the expression on the face of Paul, who was standing before him, a dark figure against the sunshine.

Paul was extremely pale, his eyes appeared black with intense feeling, his lips moved as if trying to frame some speech of which he was incapable, and for a few moments he gazed silently at his cousin.

"What is the matter, Paul?" the latter asked, changing his careless attitude for a more upright posture. He had heard something of Paul's pecuniary straits, and thought he might be on the verge of asking help of him. He knew that his introduction to Captain McIlvray had been rather unfortunate. McIlvray and Paul, being congenial spirits, had rapidly

become intimate; this intimacy had brought Paul into immediate contact with the other officers of the regiment, and in turn with their friends. Those Highland officers were all men of means and family, they were nearly all unmarried, and more or less fast, and the usual consequences of a young man associating with richer men than himself had ensued.

Late hours, play, moderate by a rich man's standard, but high by a poor man's, steeple-chasing by a horse due at sick people's doors, and suchlike, had combined to empty the doctor's pockets and scandalize his patients, particularly the steady-going burghers of Medington, who did not care to trust their families or themselves to the hands of a young man, who, instead of occupying his leisure with medical books, consorted with a "set of rackety officers;" and for all this Edward felt to some extent responsible.

"I asked you," Paul replied in the incisive tones of white-hot passion, "to come out here,

because I think it time to come to an understanding."

"An understanding of what? If it is money, dear fellow, I think I can promise to help you."

"Money," repeated Paul with ironical laughter, "money indeed!"

This lofty scorn of that cause of so much mischief, the lack of which is so excessively inconvenient to ordinary mortals, was less edifying than amusing in a man who was head over ears in debt, and a half smile stole over Edward's face when he heard it. A certain grandiose manner which Paul inherited from his mother, and which sometimes degenerated into affectation, often amused his simple-mannered cousin, and provoked him to the expression of wholesome ridicule. But the tragic set of Paul's features warned him that anything in the shape of laughter would be ill-timed, so he composed his face to the decent gravity, observing that he had feared, from certain hints Paul had given, that times were hard with him, and

that he was delighted to find himself mistaken.

"If it isn't money," he reflected, "it must be love. Though, how on earth I am to help him at that, I don't know."

"You seem a cup too low," he added aloud. "Come, cheer up; whatever it is, you have the world before you, and a stout pair of arms to fight it with."

"Thank you," Paul replied with sharper irony, "I am in no need of either your advice or your sympathy."

"Then, what in the world does he want?" thought the other. "It cannot be his mother's temper."

"Surely you must know what explanation I require," continued Paul, relieving his irritation by dinting the turf sharply with his heel. Edward possessed that perfect good temper which results from the combination of good digestion, a clean conscience and congenial circumstances; the undisturbed amiability with which he met his fiery cousin's determination to quarrel with him was most

aggravating. "Is it possible," Paul thought, concentrating his blazing glance upon that cheerful face, "that this man can be such a hypocrite as well as a traitor? I wish to know," he added aloud, "the object of your visits to Arden Manor?"

"Indeed?" The good-tempered face darkened now. "That is my affair." Edward rose from the bench, made a few steps and then retraced them. "Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you brought me out here for the express purpose of asking why I visit at Arden?"

"For the express purpose," replied Paul, the breath coming audibly through his quivering nostrils.

The momentary irritation passed away and Edward laughed.

"You always were a queer fellow," he said; "but why this paternal interest in my goings and comings?"

"I warned you," continued Paul; "I explained the situation to you; I have spoken to you since of my hopes and wishes. You

have indeed honoured my confidence. The very first day you went there by stealth. It was unnecessary, you might have gone openly. A second time you went by stealth when every one considered you to be miles away. Yet, after what passed in my presence, secrecy was absurd. Do you suppose me to be blind? We all know that a girl flirt delights in trying to make conquests of those who belong to others. That a man should descend so far, is, I own, almost incredible. But one must believe the evidence of one's senses. That a man, I will not say a gentleman, a man with the most elementary notions of honour should deliberately pay his addresses in a quarter to which——"

"My dear Paul," interrupted Edward, keeping a grave face with difficulty, "what a ridiculous misunderstanding this is! Beware of jealousy."

"Jealousy!" cried Paul, flinging away from him with his eyes rolling. "Jealousy, indeed! I saw you," he added inconsistently, "when you said good-bye at my door to-day.

And on that night I saw you placing her hands on the bow with your infernal fingers——"

"And were not jealous? Sensible fellow! Seriously you are in a painful position, and it makes you, as you told me the other day, over-sensitive; you cannot see things in their right proportions; you exaggerate trifles."

"Is it a trifle that you are almost an inmate of that house? that she gives you flowers? that you treasure up a flower that she drops? that you look into her eyes as I saw you look an hour ago? that you sing with her? walk alone with her? act like an idiot when she is near? By all that is sacred——"

"Come, listen to reason; I admit you are not jealous. But, as you said the other day, it makes you wretched in this uncertain state of affairs even to hear of other men going to the house, much less being civil to her."

"Civil!"

"One must be civil to ladies, especially in their own houses. I was bound to teach her to shoot. But I am innocent of the other

crimes you impute to me, I swear I am. Look here, Paul. I will stand more from you than from any man living. But you go too far. You are hard hit, and in a false position, and that makes you forget yourself. Put an end to all this, for pity's sake; ask her to marry you and have done with it."

"Have done with it; that would, no doubt, be agreeable to you," Paul repeated, with a grim smile. "But I may be mistaken, after all; you have no doubt been so obliging as to try to advance my suit by proxy."

Edward turned red when he remembered his unfortunate essay in that line in Arden churchyard.

"Nonsense," he replied, laughing. "Come, you have the field to yourself. I shall not be seeing her for weeks. In the meantime, come to the point, and let me congratulate you on being engaged before I come back again."

The easy way in which he proposed this impossible thing turned all Paul's blood to fire, made his head swim, and clouded his eyes for a moment. He knew that Edward

and Alice loved each other, and, more than that, he knew that Edward, while speaking this nonchalance, was fully aware that he had won Alice's heart. The fire of inextinguishable hate burned in his breast, and the madness of jealousy possessed him; the parting look between the two pierced like a poisoned arrow to the core of his heart; it was well for him that no deadly weapon was at hand, or his cousin's last words would have been spoken.

"You have no explanation to offer, then?" he asked.

"There is nothing to explain. You accuse me of paying too much attention to the lady of your choice. I reply that I have not done so."

"Can you deny that you love Alice Lingard?" he urged.

"Surely you mean Sibyl?" Edward faltered with a sudden pallor. "It was she of whom you spoke that night. I had not even heard of Miss Lingard's existence."

"Then it is true," Paul said tragically; and

for some moments neither cousin could do anything but try to realize the painful situation in which they found themselves.

"It was not my mistake alone," added Edward, who was now grave enough. "Your mother jested on the subject the first night I spent there."

"Are you engaged to Miss Lingard?" Paul asked, turning a stony face, from which despair had taken all the fury, towards the pained glance of his cousin.

"No," he replied, and for the moment wished he could have said yes. If he had not already won Alice's heart, he knew that he was on the high road to it. He might have spoken the night before, but he considered it scarcely seemly to be so precipitate. And, now that he had not actually committed himself, he did not know what to do. He had certainly injured Paul, and in a way that made atonement impossible.

"I am sorry for this," he said, after a pause, "more sorry than I can say." And yet he doubted if his advent had done Paul

much harm. He had had the first chance and had missed it. But what if Alice had seemed to accept his attentions for the purpose of drawing the laggard lover on? Girls often did that. Girls like Alice? Oh, no; Alice was different; she was not to be measured by ordinary standards.

The discovery that Edward had not played him false, and that he had consequently no grievance against him, served rather to intensify the jealous anger which devoured Paul's heart. Every expression of regret on Edward's part was another assurance that Alice had been stolen from him.

"You must never see her again," he said decisively. An apple-tree covered with blossom rose behind him and traced its pink and white branches upon the clear blue sky. He turned and took a thick bough in his hands, and snapped it like a stick of wax, and the pink tracery was now marked on the green turf at his feet. Edward plucked some of the red twigs of the lime tree, and twisted them round his fingers until he nearly

brought the blood. The blackbird fluted melodiously, the hum of the busy market-place went on, the church clock chimed the hour, and the gnomon of the tree-shadows changed its place on the turf-dial, while the two cousins stood silent, facing each other, divided this way and that by distracting thoughts.

"I cannot promise that," Edward replied at last. "We cannot both have her, but one must. She is not to be left to linger out her youth in doubt. I give you three months. That is a long time. Six weeks ago I had never heard of her.

Paul made another deep dent in the turf. Three months was no time, and how could he ask a woman to marry him in his present circumstances? Besides, would Alice forget Edward in three months?

Edward was asking himself the same question. He had no right to believe that she would ever think of him, and yet it seemed impossible that the stream of their lives, having once mingled, could ever divide again.

But Love is jealous. Alice had known Paul for years; she admired his character; she might easily think his own feeling for her, if not followed up in those three months, a passing fancy, and would certainly quench whatever feeling for himself might have been germinating within her, when she saw that Paul's happiness depended upon her.

"Three months is no time," Paul said.

"You must indeed be blind," returned Edward, "if you cannot see what a tremendous advantage those three months will give you. She will think I have forgotten her."

Paul did not think so, yet he wondered that Edward could face such a possibility. After all, did this cold-blooded fellow really care for her? Surely not as he did.

"I cannot live without her," he cried in his stormy way, "and perhaps you can."

"Yes," replied Edward slowly, "I *can* live without her. Perhaps I should be no good to her. If only she is happy! If she takes you—and I cannot say that I wish that—it

must be as Heaven pleases—I shall forget this, I shall try to be her friend—yes, and yours. It is something to have known her, more to have loved her. Heaven bless her! Till three months then."

He was gone.

Paul was touched. The pendulum of his impetuous nature swung to the other extreme. He could not have yielded that advantage, and he thought that if Alice took Edward she would take the better man. He remembered what a golden strand his cousin's friendship had woven in his lonely childhood and through all his life. A thousand forgotten things revived in his memory; he thought what a good fellow Edward was! what days they had had together! He knew that not every man had such a friend, and few women such a lover. And a vague foreboding warned him that the life-long comradeship would never be renewed. At last he turned to go back to the house, and met a maid tripping over the turf with a note. "From Mr. Rickman, sir," she said.

He opened it with a pre-occupied air and read :

"The infant Annesley died this morning.

"G. R."

He was now the actual heir of Gledesworth. The present owner was incapable of making a will.

"Poor little fellow!" he exclaimed; "poor baby! poor young mother!"

Then he went in to convey the weighty tidings to Mrs. Annesley.

Edward was now on his way home with a heavy weight on his heart, thinking that the two best things in his life, his love and his friendship, had been broken at one blow.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

It was a dark day in May, one of those weird, poetic days, full of purple shadows broken by bursts of hazy sun-gold, in which the most lovely and capricious of months hides its youth and freshness under a gloom borrowed from autumn as if in sport.

Mysterious folds of gloom were woven about the downs; great masses of purple and umber shade floated solemnly over the level lands below them; the hills on the horizon borrowed an adventitious grandeur from these broad cloud shadows, and from the dark haze swathed about their flanks; the level band of sea, where the hills suddenly broke away from the shore, was dark, dream-like and lighted by fitful gleams of gold; here and

there, when a rift in the heavy clouds let the sunshine through in a long, misty shaft, an unexpected field, cottage or village tower shone out from the surrounding haze, only to fade into the warm gloom again with a most magical effect; the dense dark woods, which looked autumnal in the shadow, smiled now and again under the sun-bursts into the exquisitely varied tints of fresh May foliage.

On such a day nightingales sing in the stillness of the shadowy woods, and now and then blackbirds interrupt them with their flute-notes, while larks keep fluttering upwards with sudden torrents of song. On such a day the cuckoo is less persistent in his merry defiance, and doves moan continually in fragrant fir-woods.

The square and solid tower of Arden church looked darker and grander beneath the deep cloud-piled sky, a solemn shadow brooded over the thatched roofs and stone walls of the cottages, over the grey gables of Arden Manor, and the dark-tiled Parsonage roof. From the church tower there hung in

rarely-stirred folds a flag, half-mast high; one or two were shown in the village; the throb of the slow-pulsed knell vibrated upon the quiet air. Raysh Squire was once more exercising his melancholy function in the chill darkness of the belfrey, whither even on the brightest summer days a wandering sunbeam rarely strayed, and then only in slender, half-dimmed rods. Raysh yawned; he had been pulling his rope for a good hour, and, in spite of his firm conviction that only such art as he had acquired in a life-long exercise of his craft could do justice to a funeral knell, and that such art did not reside in any mortal arm within ten miles of Arden, he sorely wanted to see and hear all that was going on outside in the thronged churchyard, and continually asked for information of the little grandchild he had stationed at the door, which stood slightly ajar for the purpose.

"Baint 'em come yet?" he kept repeating, with impatience; and the little one always said, "No; only the live ones is come."

A low murmur of voices rose from the

village and hummed under the very walls of the church; the landlord of the Golden Horse moved about with a sort of melancholy exultation irradiating his wooden visage, and gave up counting the maze of vehicles drawn up under the sycamore-trees before his door in an agreeable despair; while his wife and daughter flew hither and thither with crimson faces and panting chests, in the vain attempt to be in five places at once and the still vainer endeavour to discriminate between the numerous orders heaped upon them, until the landlady became "that harled," as she expressed it, that she relieved her feelings by dealing a sounding box on the ear of the astounded and unoffending stable-help, thus completely scattering what remained of his harried wits; after that she felt better, though it cost her a solid, silver shilling.

The whole of Arden village, gentle and simple, every one who was not too old or too ill, was about the churchyard or along the road; extreme youth was no bar to coming

out, since it could be carried in arms, whence it occasionally expressed loud dissatisfaction at the lot of man, not knowing how soon it would be quieted once and for all in the silence whence it came. Everybody wore a bit of black ribbon or crape, and every face expressed that quiet enjoyment which the British lower classes experience only at a funeral.

"Where there's one death in a family there's sure to be three avore the year's out," one kind-faced matron observed to another with unction.

"Zure enough," replied the other in an awed voice, "but taint every day there's such a sad death as this yere. My master, he zes there's trouble for everybody holding Gledesworth lands, and there ain't no going agen it no more than Scripture. Bide still, Billy, my dear; don't ee pull sister's hair now."

The national temperament, seen pure and unadulterated only in the lower classes, delights chiefly in the dismal; it may be that the countrymen of Shakspeare and

Milton have a natural bias for tragedy; it may be that strong and deep natures can only be moved by strong and deep things, such as the dark mysteries of death and sorrow. At all events the light and bright things that set other Europeans laughing and dancing, too frequently move our sober folk only to a sort of wondering contempt.

Presently a dark procession was seen winding slowly between the cottage flower-gardens; the vicar, a solitary and conspicuous figure in his white surplice, issued from the deep-arched door and walked slowly down to the lych-gate, to meet the solemn and silent guest with words of immortal hope; a touching custom, which seems like the welcome home of a son, never more to leave the fatherly roof.

Then the occupants of the carts and carriages emptied and drawn up before the Golden Horse, arranged themselves in fit order with those who had followed the hearse over the downs all the way from distant Gledesworth, and the silent and un-

conscious centre of all the lugubrious pomp was lifted on to the broad shoulders of eight stalwart labourers, in white smocks, blue Sunday trousers and broad felt hats, and borne silently after the welcoming priest into the dim church, which was already half-full of women in black (for the men were nearly all following), and where the air was tremulous with the wail of the Funeral March from the organ.

There were no breaking hearts and streaming eyes at this burial; those who had loved the man lying beneath the violet velvet pall were gone to their long home, and he who walked as chief mourner behind him, Paul Annesley, had never known him. But there were tears in Paul Annesley's eyes; his face was pale with feeling and his heart ached within him with pity for the man he had never seen, who for ten weary years had been a captive, strange to all the joys of life, dead to all its interests and affections, exchanging no rational word with his fellow-men, and seeing the face of none who loved him. Yet

though it was well that the darkness of death should close upon this terrible affliction, the pity of it struck keen to the heart of the man who inherited the possessions which had been so valueless to their owner, and the fact that all the lands they had traversed that morning, the very land out of which that small field reserved for God and the poorest of men were taken, belonged to him, made that darkened and silenced life seem the more pitiful to the heir, standing above the coffin in the flower of his youth.

Paul had been discontented with his lot, and now one higher than he had ever dreamed of was his. He was in some sort the lord of all that following of tenantry who packed the church aisles and thronged the churchyard in silent homage to the poor dead maniac. His sudden good-fortune touched his heart to the core, made it ache with compassion for his unknown kinsman, and pierced it with a sense of his own defects. Dr. Davis, his former successful rival, stood not far off, having come uninvited out of respect to the dead man, or

rather to his position. Their relative positions were indeed changed, and Paul was ashamed of his former jealousy. Gervase Rickman was there as steward to the estate; the broad-faced, hearty-voiced farmers who yesterday might employ him or not as they chose, were to-day his tenants; their manner to him had changed already. He was still actually the parish doctor; only two nights ago he rode over the bleak downs to help Daniel Pink's wife in her trouble, Daniel Pink, who, though not on the home farm, represented his father, now too feeble for the service, as a bearer.

There was little air in the dim, massive church, where the heavy arches rested on low, solid piers of immense girth; it was obstructed by old-fashioned square pews; the light came dimly through the deep, small-paned windows, many of which, stained richly, broke the white daylight in various colours over the stone effigies of former Annesleys, couched there with lance and helm in perpetual prayer. The musty odour of the

unsunned church was stifling; the monotonous voice of the clergyman fell sadly upon the ear, echoed by Raysh Squire's still more monotonous church falsetto, complaining of the brevity of man's stay upon earth and its sadness; these things, and the strangeness of the thoughts which came upon him as he stood in a position to which he was not born, and which was yet his by birth, so wrought on Paul that he could scarcely remain there, and was glad when the rite in the church was done, and they came out into the free air again, and the buzz of low voices died away before them.

A sun-burst fell upon the violet pall; it lighted the white smocks of the bearers, the weathered stonework of the church, the delicate green of the elms where rooks were cawing, and glorified the faces of the crowd. Paul wondered how his turn of fortune would work on Alice? It would be nothing without her, and though he now contrasted his position with Edward's triumphantly, he would gladly have exchanged with him, or sunk

back into the struggling and unsuccessful parish doctor, if he could but win Alice.

People looked with wondering interest at the pale face, so familiar to most of them under such different associations, for the most part with harmless envy of one on whom Fortune had so suddenly smiled, otherwise not without a vague pity. There were whispers of the mysterious doom which clung to the owner of Gledesworth, and speculations as to this man's fate. Would he too go down to the grave, unmourned by a son of his blood, not knowing who should gather the riches he left behind him?

Many, nay most of the tenants remembered Reginald Annesley before his great affliction had sundered him from his fellow-men, some of them remembered old kindnesses and genial words, all were touched with an awed pity, which was the deeper because they did not know that no blind Fate, but youthful excess, developing a hereditary tendency, was the true cause of his long affliction. Especially was this the feeling of the simple-hearted men

who bore their master and friend to his tomb To them his solitary following of one unknown kinsman was all the more striking because of the large retinue which surrounded him; they thought of the sad life of which this was the close, and their hearts went out in strong pity; they listened to Job's lament over the sorrow and brevity of man's life, mingled with the terrible cry that was wrung from Notker's awestruck heart a thousand years ago, when the falling of a bridge crushed so many strong lives out before his eyes, with a deep sense of the pathos of human destiny. Daniel Pink, the shepherd, looked up and caught the intense glance of Paul's eyes, and pitied him too, he knew not why.

Daniel Pink did not envy any man; if he had been offered any other lot than his own, he would probably have refused it. For he had all that man needs, the warm affections of a home that his own strong arms maintained, and a plain path of daily duty marked out before him; he walked upon an earth full of meaning and beauty, and looked up to an

infinite heaven of majesty and wonder. His heart was touched with pity both for the rich man they were laying in his tomb, his father's master, and for the young heir who stood living before him.

Only when the last words of prayer and blessing were said, the last rites done, and they turned away from the vault, the reality of his changed fortune came home to Paul, and with it a new sense of human responsibility, and especially his own. Yearnings for a better life came to him on the brink of that dark vault; he resolved to be worthy of the gifts suddenly heaped upon him. How mean his past life seemed in the light of these new aspirations!

So he thought as he left the churchyard leading on his arm the widow of young Reginald Annesley, and the mother of the dead baby, who, like himself, had never seen the elder Reginald. One of his first duties would be to make her a liberal provision; for, owing to unforeseen circumstances and the reversal of natural order in the untimely

deaths of her husband and child, scarcely anything had fallen to her share. There was even a pathos in the fact that this dead man had carefully entailed his estates, but vainly since his issue failed and his lands passed immediately to an unknown heir-at-law.

Mrs. Walter Annesley was in the church, veiled in crape, with a handkerchief to her eyes, yet by no means consumed with grief. She had indeed one cause of sorrow in the fact that Paul's inheritance had fallen to him so early that he had not time to appreciate the sacrifice she made to pay his debts. She was thinking of the new lord of Gledesworth, and wishing that Alice, who was sitting unseen at the organ, would meditate on the same theme.

"Let us fly from this dismal place, Alice," cried Sibyl in the afternoon; "of all the humbugs in this humbugging world, funerals are the greatest and most dismal. I will not have any fuss made about me when I am

dead, remember that. I am so glad Paul is turned into a little prince. I never realized it till to-day. I suppose he will be too grand to come to the Manor now."

"Do you want to get rid of him, Sibyl?"

"I? Oh! my dear, he does not come to see *me*," replied Sibyl with an air of raillery apparently lost on Alice, who was busy arranging Hubert's collar so as to leash him. But Sibyl was not easily extinguished, and when they had gone a little way through the fields she returned to the charge.

"I am sure that he was not happy, Alice," she said with a mysterious air; "there was a secret canker at the root of everything, and I believe it was want of money."

"If you are alluding to Daniel Pink," replied Alice with a little smile, "he is the most contented fellow I know, and though his large family does make him poor——"

"Alice, how provoking you are. Pink indeed!"

As they were setting forth expressly to visit Pink's wife and welcome the ninth baby,

Alice explained that it was most natural to be thinking of him.

"As if people could think of anybody but the new little king," replied Sibyl; "I feel quite set up myself. Do look round, Alice, and realize that all this belongs to Paul Annesley, this very turf we are walking on and our own dear Arden Manor down there by the church. I suppose he could turn us out if he chose, we are a kind of vassals. I almost wish he would, Arden is so very dull; don't you?"

"You are growing restless again. Is this philosophic?" asked Alice, placing the basket she was carrying to the shepherd's wife on the ground and resting her arms on a gate half-way up the down.

"No; it's human. Yes, I am restless. I want—oh, I want—*everything!*" cried Sibyl.

Alice took the bright face in her hands, and kissed it. "You are a little fool, Sibbie," she said gently, "a dear little fool. Write some more verses, it always does you good.

I am not sure that a good whipping would not be the best thing."

"No doubt," replied Sibyl, while she lifted her head and gazed on the solemn fields and hills over which the great cloud-shadows were slowly sailing in larger and larger masses, thus leaving rarer intervals of sun-light, as if she were looking in vain for happiness. "Do you think, Alice, it will be always like this? Quiet Arden, Raysh ringing the bells, the garden, the dairy, a day's shopping at Medington, an occasional visitor, Mrs. Pink's annual baby, the choir-practice, and Horace Merton coming home from Oxford and worrying the vicar?"

Alice looked thoughtfully at Sibyl's pretty wistful face and wondered "who he was?" Surely not young Merton himself, the vicar's troublesome prodigal, whom she had seen that morning, the only uninterested person during the funeral, at full length in a hammock under the vicarage trees, studying French literature in yellow paper covers, in obedience to his father's request that he

should "read a little" during his enforced absence from Oxford; an absence connected with the unauthorized introduction of a monkey to the apartments of a Don, as poor Mr. Merton understood. This young gentleman haunted the Manor with the persistence of an ancestral ghost, and was not without his good points, in spite of the monkey incident; yet though Sibyl diligently snubbed him, as she did all her victims as soon as the nature of their malady became apparent, no one could say when and in whose person the fated man might appear.

"Perhaps there will be a change for us," Alice said; "Mrs. Pink may not go on having babies for ever, and Horace Merton will not be sent down more than once again. And some day Raysh will be ringing the bells for your wedding."

"What a trivial notion! Can't you originate something a little less commonplace?"

"Well! for mine then. I am sure that is a new idea. Then you would get rid of me."

"I don't know," replied Sibyl, "I don't think you would go very far."

"Dear Sibbie, you are more sibylline than usual. I can't see the point of the innuendo, unless you mean me to elope with Raysh," said Alice, pursuing her way tranquilly with the basket in her hand.

"I do think you are stone-blind," continued Sibyl, in a graver tone. "My dear, don't you know what everybody else knows or has known for the last few weeks, that that poor fellow's happiness hangs upon your breath?"

Alice grew hot, and made a movement of impatience; then she asked Sibyl to speak plainly and leave the subject.

"He is really such a good fellow, and it would make us all so happy to have you near, and you would make him so happy. And his mother wishes it, she even asked me to try to bring it on."

"Oh!" returned Alice, with a sigh of relief, "in strict confidence, I suppose, Miss Sib. A pretty conspirator she chose when

she lighted upon you. You sweet goose, if you must needs amuse yourself with match-making, you could not hit upon a worse plan than to show your hand."

"But, Alice, do be serious——"

"Dear child, I am serious, and I wish you to understand once for all that it is a mistake, and to help me spare him the pain of a direct refusal. I saw it all months ago, and have done my best to put a stop to it. I even thought of going away for a time."

"It is in your power to make him so happy," said Sibyl pathetically. "You might grow to care for him in time, you know."

"Never," she answered. "I could never—in any case—have cared for a man of that uncontrolled disposition—even supposing——"

"Supposing what?" Sibyl asked with a keen look.

"Oh! nothing. I mean, even if I loved him, I could never be happy with such a man. I am like my mother. I saw her misery, Sibyl, child as I was. There was that in my poor

father which made her feel him her inferior—it is not for me to speak of his faults. If I once found what I could not respect in a man, I could not live with him. I have a sort of pride——"

"But, Alice," interrupted Sibyl quickly, "if you cannot respect Paul Annesley, whom then can you respect?"

"Oh, I beg his pardon," replied Alice, her breath taken away by this sudden indignation; "I spoke widely. Of course I respect our old and true friend Paul. But a husband—that is different—it is something stronger and deeper than respect, it is reverence that a husband compels."

"And what can you not reverence in Dr. Annesley?" asked Sibyl with such remorseless persistence, that Alice began to wonder if Paul Annesley could be the name of him who had troubled her friend's peace of mind.

"He is at the mercy of his own impulses," she said.

"And they are always good," pursued Sibyl vindictively.

"You say a bold thing, when you say that of any human being, Sibyl. No, I can only give my deepest reverence to the man who is master of himself. 'Give me the man that is not passion's slave.' I can value this one as a friend, but—no nearer. No one knows what is in Paul Annesley; any turn of fate may bring him into a totally opposite direction; he might do anything. I tell you in the very strictest confidence what I would tell no other human being, I tremble for him now; he will never be the same again, now that his circumstances are so changed, and what he will be, Heaven alone knows. As you say, he has good impulses, but what are they without a guiding principle and a compelling will?"

"And you alone can give his life a right direction," urged Sibyl. "Oh, Alice! think what it is to hold this man's fate in your hands!"

"And what if I hold another——" She stopped short and coloured. "Dear Sibyl, you are indeed a staunch friend," she added

in a gentler voice. "If he could win you now—a heart is so easily caught at the rebound."

"There will be no rebound," replied Sibyl, in so even a voice that Alice was sure of the Platonic nature of her regard for Paul. "The kind of malady you inspire, you dear creature, is incurable. People soon get over the slight shocks I administer, but you are fatal."

Alice smiled tenderly upon Sibyl, but made no rejoinder, and they walked on noiselessly over the rich turf, deep in thought. Sibyl's regard for Alice had, as the other well knew, something of worship; her ardent nature invested her friendships with a romantic enthusiasm that sometimes made her calmer friend smile and often called forth a gentle rebuke from her. Perhaps Alice's affection for the younger and more impetuous girl was as strong as Sibyl's, though it expressed itself less passionately, and had a strong dash of maternal compassion. Nothing had ever come between them since they had first met, two shy

stranger girls of thirteen in the porch of Arden Manor, and instantly lost their shyness in the fellow-feeling it engendered between them.

The first bar was to come that day. It happened in Daniel Pink's solitary thatched cottage, which was built in a nest-like hollow under the down. The girls entered the low porch, like the welcome guests they were, and sat in the dim smoke-blackened room, handling and discussing the ninth little Pink by turns, while the shepherd looked on with a pleased face, with the deposed baby in his arms and two chubby children a little older clinging to his knees.

"Look at the heft of 'n," said the proud father, "entirely drags ye down, Miss Sibyl, 'e do."

"I wouldn't carry him a mile for a fortune," Sibyl replied, kissing the little red fist, "not for all the lands of Gledesworth, Shepherd."

"I 'lows you wouldn't, Miss. Dr. Annesley have took a heavy weight on the shoulders

of 'n. A many have been bowed down by riches, a many, as I've a yerd zay."

"And many have been crushed by poverty," Alice said.

"Zure enough. 'Taint fur we to zay what's good for us, Miss Alice. A personable man, but a doesn't come up to the Captain, the doctor doesn't."

"The Captain?" asked Alice, wondering.

"Oh! he is only a lieutenant. You mean Lieutenant Annesley, don't you, Master Pink?" said the ready Sibyl.

"When I zeen he and you walking together, Miss Lingard," continued the shepherd gravely, "I zes to mezelf, I zes, 'Marriages is made in Heaven,' I zes. And Mam Gale, she zays——"

"Oh! Master Pink, you won't forget about the seedlings, will you?" cried Alice, starting up. "It is getting so late. We have stayed too long."

And with hasty farewells Alice left the cottage, forgetting the basket and leaving Sibyl to follow more leisurely. She walked

so fast that she had reached the gate at the end of the field through which the cottage was approached before Sibyl had left the garden, and waited for her there, with flushed cheeks. Sibyl's ready tongue was unaccountably tied when she joined her; a strange pain was gnawing at her heart, and Alice's attempts at commonplace chat did not succeed.

"I can't help thinking that this same Mr. Edward Annesley might just as well write to us, Alice," she said at last. "That little note to mother the day after he left was the briefest formality."

"Perhaps," replied Alice, who had now regained her self-possession, "he thinks the same of us. You can scold him when he comes."

"But will he come?" asked Sibyl, with such eagerness that Alice stopped on her way and looked with sudden misgiving into Sibyl's dark ardent eyes and read all.

"Sibyl," she said, "oh! Sibyl!" and she tried to draw her nearer; but Sibyl pushed

her back with a look Alice had never seen before, and walked on in silence.

In the first bitter flood of jealous agony that surged into her heart Sibyl felt capable of hating her friend; then the mortifying memory of her self-deception made her so hot with self-contempt that every other feeling was swallowed up in it, and she longed for the earth to open and hide her away for ever. It seemed as if she had better never have been born than make so dreadful a blunder at the very threshold of life; she thought she could never endure to live any more. Then things came back to her memory, little insignificant details which had passed unobserved at the time, but which now showed the general meaning of the whole story, just as the festal lights reveal the general outlines of a building, and she saw clearly how things stood between Edward and Alice. How could it have been otherwise? She felt the charm of Alice too deeply herself to wonder that she should have been preferred. It

was inevitable that those two should choose each other. But for her everything had come to a full stop. "Entbehren sollst du," was the message the woods and fields and sea had for her that day; it was written in the deep cloud-piled sky, and in the solemn shadows about the hills; the rooks, sailing home in stately chanting procession, reminded her of it, and the blackbirds, fluting mournfully down in the copses, repeated it; even the lark, fluttering upwards with the beginning of a song, and dropping back into silence, had the same meaning in his music.

She paused and allowed Alice to come up with her, and seeing that she had been crying, kissed her with a sort of passion.

"Do you remember the day you first came to Arden, Alice?" she said, "when I found you crying in your room after we were sent to bed?"

"And you comforted me, and we agreed always to be friends."

"And now my crossness has made you cry,

you poor dear! And you are dearer to me than anybody in the whole universe."

"Sibyl!"

"And there is Gervase out by the ricks wondering why we are so late. Let us make haste home."

Then Gervase caught sight of them and came to meet them, scolding them both with fraternal impartiality for being so late. He had lately taken to living in rooms at Medington to save time in going and coming from business, and now expected to be treated as a guest in his frequent visits to Arden.

He looked at Sibyl and saw that something was wrong; and Alice looked at the brother and sister with a sort of remorse. In spite of Gervase's well-acted brotherliness, she was not sure that she had not driven him from his home, and now she had done something worse to his sister; all this was a poor requital to the family in which she had been received, a lonely child. The question now arose, how should she set these wrongs right?

How could she stand alone against the iron strength of Fate?

This helplessness completely crushed her spirits; she slipped away to the solitude of her own room under the pretext of fatigue, and sat musing long at the open lattice.

Gervase in the meantime had taken his violin, and, leaning against the great apple-tree, whence the blossom was now almost gone, drew his bow across the strings so that they made an almost human cry, a sound that never failed to bring Sybil to his side, and she came out and sat in the seat beneath him, while he played on in silence strains so mournful and so tender that they drew the over-charge of feeling from her heart and the refreshing tears to her eyes, till the "Entbehren sollst du, sollst entbehren," which the lark and the breezes sang to her in the afternoon, seemed the sweetest refrain in the world.

While he played, a series of pictures rose before Gervase's mind, pictures in which he saw himself baffling by continual thrusts the

fate which to Alice seemed so invincible, until he had bound Edward to his sister, and Alice to himself.

Alice heard the music from her window, and it drew tears from her eyes.

END OF VOL. I.

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